異世界迷宮でハーレムを1

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ヒーロー文庫

SLAVE HAREM IN THE LABYRINTH OF THE OTHER WORLD (LN)

– Isekai Meikyuu De Dorei Harem wo –

- VOLUME 1 -

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[Light Novels Translations]

– STORY –

A man was about to commit suicide and decided to search for a way to die on the internet, but then he found an odd site that asked a lot of questions and had a point based system that allows you to create skills for a character. He took interest in it, and when he was done setting his character, he was asked, “You will now be transported to a world with the settings you chose. Coming back is not possible. Do you still accept?” Without thinking much of it, he pressed YES and found himself in another world with the skills he chose to have.

– GENRE –

Action Adventure Ecchi Fantasy Harem
Mature Seinen Slice of Life

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美人。ものすごい美人である。
いやすごい。この世界の美人は地球より上だ。
メイドはクロウサーヌというようだ。

スローラビットに近づいた俺は上段から魔物の肩口辺りに斬りつけた。
デュランダルが魔物をえぐり、肩からわき腹へと一刀のもとに切り裂く。
スローラビットはそのまま倒れ伏した。一撃だ。

ロクサーヌが俺を見てあわてて頭を下げる。
イヌミミが揺れた。あの耳はかわいい。
ロクサーヌが頭を下げたまま告げた。

「……私にはご主人様に
買っていただく資格がありません」

異世界迷宮でハーレムを　1

▶ INTRODUCTION

▶ ワンクリックで人生が一変する

▶ 自殺サイトをのぞいていたこの物語の主人公・**加賀道夫**。
世の中に絶望し、ネットの世界を浮遊していた一高校生が、突然、異世界に紛れ込んでしまう。
しかも、**「強い男」**に生まれ変わっていたのだ。
学校ではいじめを受けていた少年が、異世界では、
強い冒険者として畏怖される存在になっていた。
学校では女子とは無縁だった少年が、
異世界ではアイドル級の**美少女を「手に入れる」権利**に手が届きそうになった。
ネットの深淵部に紛れ込み、**ワンクリックで人生を変えてしまった道夫**。
新しい人生にはみじめさや暗さなんてかけらもない。
生まれ変わった少年のチートでハーレムな伝説が今、はじまる!

異世界迷宮でハーレムを1

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PROLOGUE

1

Have you ever heard of this? A Suicide Site?

Oh, don't give me that look, I know you have. Pretty much everyone's heard of at least one these days. A website on the internet where you can find various ways of committing suicide or kindred spirits to commit group suicide with.

When I first stumbled upon this, I was deeply confused, to be honest.

For you see, I didn't really want to kill myself, but at the same time, I was at a time in my life that I didn't really want to live either, and the prospect of definitely ending my shallow existence once and for all appeared strangely alluring to me.

Because this world has done everything it could and then some to drive me into the deepest pits of darkest despair.

I am being bullied and ostracized at school, in a way that's more hideous than your standard, by-the-book physical abuse: I was being ignored by everyone, treated as if I was nothing but air. In class, during lunch breaks or when going to and back from school, I was always alone. When an assignment required us to get in pairs, I would always end up as the sole one who had no partner. Every. Single. Time.

When the number of male and female members in our class was uneven, teachers would try to pair me up with girls. You can probably guess how that swell idea was going to end up, but I'm going to tell you anyway, just to kick myself in the balls some more, because at this point, why the hell not? Every one of those bitches would try to weasel her way out of being assigned to me. They did so either by saying they already made a promise to be together with someone else, or when that tactic proved to be ineffective, they would reluctantly join me only to do all the work themselves. And they did all of that without even glancing in my direction or uttering a single word. Oftentimes I could swear I saw the aura of resentment towards me manifesting itself around them physically as a form of protective armor, and comments like "I feel defiled", "I have to go cleanse myself with holy water" or "I can never be a bride now"

were so common that I stopped counting them after a 100th time, give or take. I thought I was used to them already, but no matter how often I heard them or in how many variations, they still hurt the same, adding more and more fuel to the brightly burning pyre of my self-hatred.

And before some of you ask that dumb question, no, it wasn't like that in high school only. It was like that ever since elementary school, where I was getting into fights with the other kids almost on a daily basis, resulting in me getting labeled as a violent delinquent. You'd think that things would get better given enough time. Well, boy do I have news for you, they didn't. Not in the slightest.

By the time I was in 4th grade I was everyone's sandbag during almost every break, especially after one of the classes when we were all sharing our dreams for the future with each other. I had, in a splendid display of childish idiocy, blurted out that I wanted to be a professional wrestler. Adding to that, I was always thrown out of the class when it was time to change for P.E., and in the summer when it was time for swimming classes my clothes *and my clothes only* would always magically end up thrown into the pool. Yup, those were the days of my childhood that I don't want to remember.

I have to say though, things did quiet down a little bit when I began to learn Kendo as a means of self-defense. It was also a very effective way to channel all of my pent-up frustration and violence into something productive. By the time my sh*tfest of a life reached the 2nd year of Junior High, the physical bullying stopped completely and switched to the mental one. I think that one incident when I'd "accidentally" beat the everlasting f*ck out of one of my oppressors and ended up sending him to the hospital for a few months had something to do with, but I can be wrong about it. Well, let's not dwell on the small details for now. Bottom line is, for a while things did quiet down. No one dared to raise his hand against me, but I did become an outcast without a single friend.

Throughout the years of their education kids can be some real sacks of sh*t, wouldn't you agree? Once they will learn that they can't inflict harm upon you physically, they will try to do so mentally. As if there was any real chance of them finally leaving me alone.

The attitude of my father at home was pretty much the same. When my mother died, the first thing he did instead of mourning her was turning me into the object of his domestic violence. "YOU SHOULD BE THANKING ME, I'M DOING IT ALL FOR YOUR SAKE!" he shouted as he was beating the crap out of me to the point of unconsciousness.

That was the moment when I finally realized that this is what this wretched world is all about. No matter how hard you'll try to live a good, honest life, the only way for you to make your dreams come true is to do so by eliminating everything and everyone who stands between you and your goal. Only when you are standing atop the mountain of the countless corpses of your enemies where no one will ever be able to threaten you anymore while triumphantly sipping the nectar of sweet victory, only then you'll be allowed to tell that you have truly won the sh*tty game called "Life".

Heh, such an outlook on life sounds like it's more befitting of a criminal or a petty member of the Yakuza, but that's how it really is. Without power, you're no one. Just one of the nameless nobodies living their days aimlessly as a member of the like-minded grey mass of mediocrity. At least, that's what I think after everything I've been through.

This world is a hopeless, truly rotten place. Looking back on it now, it must have been precisely because of that.

That was the reason why I decided to click on the link to that obviously shady suicide site I found one night while I was surfing the net in the solitude of my own room after I've had my fill of father's beatdowns for the day.

How should I put it? It was… an eye-opening experience. I'm not kidding, reading through everything that was posted there really helped me understand what a fool I was up until that point. Before, I thought I was the only one who had it rough, but now I finally saw that the world was riddled with hundreds of thousands of people of all backgrounds and ages who just couldn't take it anymore and therefore they searched for a way out. On that day, something had changed within me, as if a switch was suddenly flipped inside of my mind. What began as a curious one-time-only read began to develop into a keen interest. So I've read all the posts, gathered the information, went through all the links and finally reached what could be called the site's inner sanctum.

Thinking about it carefully, this world has brought me nothing but regrets. I had no one I could call my lover, no friends and no family who would support me through thick and thin. And if that was the case, why would I even bother to continue living in such a hell on earth?

My grades were not exceptional in any way. Because of the domestic violence in my family it would be impossible for me to go to the university. We barely had any money

to make ends meet. My only redeeming quality were my Kendo skills honed since my early years. In addition to Kendo, I really wanted to train in Judo or Karate, but since the lessons cost a fortune that was impossible. Even with Kendo, I was only able to practice it because the master of the local Dojo trained kids free of charge and also leant them their equipment, but I knew he was not doing it out of the kindness of his heart. That was only an excuse for him so he could give "private lessons" to the kids he took a "liking" to, especially the girls. So in case you didn't hear me the first time, let me reiterate:

This world is a truly rotten place.

The list of my regrets was much longer than the ones relating to my family's financial situation, of course. One of them was my desire to finally graduate from being a virgin. I mean really, who wouldn't see that coming? Dying without having any experience in sex? Now that would be lame. Just like any other high school boy my age, I wanted to try doing it at least once. I wanted to know if releasing all of your sexual desire into a girl really felt as good as everyone else around me was saying.

Like that, the days went by without bringing any significant changes with them. All this time, I was on the fence about whether or not I really wanted to kill myself. After all, the thought of ending my life with my own hands scared the living hell out of me. I was afraid of the pain and of what would happen if by some miracle I managed to screw things up. And while we are on the subject, I wonder if dying is really as simple as books portray it to be: that you just close your eyes, drift away to sleep and that's it. Well, I guess that might be the case for dying of natural causes like illness or old age, but for everything else? I guess I was still too big of a wuss to test it out for myself.

I was pretty good at Kendo. It might be tough, but maybe if I put more effort into it I'll be able to make my living out of that? That certainly wouldn't be half bad if it worked.

As for losing my V-Card, all good things come to those who wait, I guess. Surely I will get my chance to get down and dirty with someone nice if I were patient. And if I officially attained the status of a Wizard first (reach 30 years of age still virgin)? I didn't give a fuck.

Having such conflicting thoughts in my mind I went on reading the posts published on the site, where I was a regular by this time. And one fateful night, my eyes fell upon a link to a post titled <Before You Decide To Commit Suicide>.

This is it.

A guide that is going to help me make up my mind!

This is what I wanted the whole time!

2

With my excitement quickly rising, I decided to click on the link. Who knows, maybe it will point me towards some good alternatives to suicide? I am just a teenager in his second year of high school after all, so checking out the alternatives before committing myself to the real deal was understandable.

Now let's see what we have here… uh-huh, all right, cool, I get it…

I muttered to myself as I was slowly scrolling down the page. To give you a brief rundown of its contents, it stated that if you find your own world to be a shitty place where you absolutely cannot live, then why not move to another one?

That was… not what I was expecting, if I am to be honest. But on the other hand, there was a surprising amount of sense to it. I mean, think about it: if you're fed up with the world you live in, then switching to one that that is more to your liking is kinda obvious.

The page listed many examples of such worlds: a world which is technologically advanced, a world where pirates and their ships make the law, an ancient world filled with swords and magic… such a world might really not sound so bad. If I chose something like that, I could move to a world which was inhabited not only by disgusting humans, but also beautiful and noble elves, hard-working dwarves or even demi-humans and beasts lived together. That would certainly be interesting.

But how can you move to such a world, you ask? That's simple, really. The answer to that question is: through games. Internet ones, to be more specific.

And it just so happens that the page was providing links to the main pages of all kinds of games, not only the ones that I listed above.

I guess I could give one of them a try, just for the hell of it. It will certainly be healthier than spending the whole night reading the comments of the other users of the suicide

site for who-knows-which night in a row. Yes, let's think about it like a much-needed change of pace, or a breath of fresh air. See, for all my earlier trash-talking I can still act like a semi-decent human being if I want to. If I have to fill my head with something then I'd much rather it be games than suicidal thoughts. Maybe it's my internal coward speaking through me now, but I have seen for myself over the past few days there were many people who thought exactly the same, so maybe those kinds of advertisements were made specifically to appeal to them? Well, whatever.

When it comes to online games I can proudly say that I am not a total noob, since I did play some of them in the past. Although, I have to admit that my friendless loner attitude must have rubbed off on me pretty hard, because even when playing online games, where meeting new people and cooperating with them is kinda the point of it all, I was a bona fide solo player. I was what you might call a quintessential casual, playing only what looked nice and casting it aside as soon as I got bored with it. But when I did play, I made sure to enjoy every second of it. Even if the game was a literal piece of crap, I didn't hate it per se, just the people who made it this way.

All right, so when I entered the page of one game that looked interestingly enough for me, the first thing I was told to do was choose my race and the country of origin from a very impressive selection of choices. Hmm, maybe I should aim for something interesting, like a mixture of the most unexpected things possible? And if I get tired of it anyway, I can always just start over from scratch.

The next page was about the frequency of wars occurring in the game's world. So it is the setting where countries fight with each other for supremacy instead of being friendly, I guess? I wonder if it's going to be similar to the battles between guilds, but on a much larger scale?

Well, not that it's going to have that much meaning for me as a solo player anyway. With that in mind, I think I'm going to choose one of the more friendly countries. Okay, now that that's done, what do we have next? Dungeon type or Field type? Now this is going to be a difficult decision. Can't I just choose both at once? Oh, well would you look at that, apparently I can. Sweet, both it is then. It's also good that you can just choose the settings recommended by the game itself since there are just so many detailed options to choose from that carefully reading through all of them would have probably taken me an entire night's worth of sleep.

One of the last things to choose from was the language settings. Huh? What's this, how come Japanese is not the default one?!What even is this Brahim language? I have no

idea, but since it's a default one then it's probably better to leave it as it is without messing around with it too much.

Soon after that I have arrived at the section of the character creation labeled as [Bonus Points Distribution]. Huh, I guess every online game has one of those nowadays. The system itself was similar to the one featured in the classics like D&D where you had to [roll] your character statistics based on the total value of your roll. You have a total of 6 basic stats: Strength, Dexterity, Constitution, Intellect, Wisdom and Luck, and the total value of the roll of your virtual [dice] determines the numerical bonuses to those 6 stats. Thankfully it looks like you can reroll your character stats as many times as you like until you roll your ideal desired results so at least I don't have to worry about being stuck with something totally useless and not suited to my preferred play-style. The only downside to it is that rolling "exactly" what you want might take a considerable amount of time since the RNG was not on the players side most of the time when it came to stat distribution. But since I don't want to half-ass everything this time around, I should take my time to roll something that will at the very least be decent to play with instead of a total random.

Points-wise, many of the initial stats were at the values between 10 and 20, meaning that they were the very basic ones and we want something better than that, so we're rerolling that one.

The next roll scored me a total between 40 and 50, so I wasn't as bad as the first one, but it wasn't good either. Another reroll then, don't fail me this time. Let's fast forward a number of rerolls into the future where I finally managed to score myself something genuinely good. I have a feeling that this is the best result I could have hoped for, so I'll be keeping that one. Also, the color of all the values was green, which indicates that my roll was an above-average one. All right, looks like we're off to a pretty good start in here, but I wonder if we can perhaps do a little bit better?

Generally speaking, in games that use the dice rolling system for deciding the stats rolling anything which has a total value of 75 and above is considered to be good, but most of the players (at least from what I've heard online) always aimed for a total 80 or above in order to really maximize their roll and squeeze every additional point they could to ensure the best start possible for themselves. My current total is 79, so the million-dollar question is: should I keep it or try to push my luck a bit and aim for that famed 80?

…Ah screw it, You Only Live Once Rolls for the win, we're starting over!

As a result, I ended up with a total value of 60. Figures. Nothing like a little bit of F rank gacha luck kicking you in the nuts to remind you that you're not the hot Sh*t you thought yourself to be. Are we going to leave that poor 60 be and finally start the game? Hell no! I rolled something good once, so I can do it again, even if I have to result to using the most secret, forbidden technique of stat rolling: [Rapid Fire Mouse Clicking]! While I am furiously clicking away, here's some random trivia about this technique for you: the most skilled of its users are supposedly able to achieve the clicking frequency of 30 clicks per second! Isn't that like, awesomely unreal?! I wonder what games they were playing in order to achieve such a form at using it *(TL NOTE: Ever heard of StarCraft, kid?).*

As I continued to click like crazy, having nothing more but my eyes to rely on when to stop, a number 8 flashed before my eyes. Was that number 80 just now? It was 80, wasn't it?! Unfortunately, the number that was displayed on the screen when I stopped tapping that left mouse button was a measly 19. CRAP BASKETS! I did it! For just a brief moment I have scored that legendary 80 and I blew it out the window! OF-FUCKING-COURSE!!! And you know what comes next? That's right, you guessed it, we're starting over one more time!

Inhale… *Exhale*… *Inhale*… *Exhale*…

My disappointment is immeasurable and my day is ruined even more than it already was. *Sigh* well, no use crying over spilt milk I guess, we're just back to the Redoville for the moment.

The next few attempts were filled with 60 and 70 somethings, but let's be real here guys, all right? You know as well as I do that after scoring that 80 once I wasn't going to stop until I scored another 80 again. This is what we players do after all, it is literally in our blood, that competitive drive, or what normies would normally call a [Hold My Beer Syndrome]. We've all been there or at least saw someone from our surroundings being there, right? That certain someone who is like [*Come on man, there's no way that you'll actually *insert whatever stupid thing here**] and the other guy, being an absolute Chad Thundercock of a madman that he is being all like [*I'm not going to do it? I'm not going to do it?! Here, hold my beer!*] usually followed by poor Chad either embarrassing himself in front of everyone or hurting himself in a really stupid way. Of course, with my personal situation being the way it is I have never really had the chance to be such a Chad myself, which is why now is a perfect, probably once in a lifetime opportunity for me.

[Give it a break you loser, there's no way someone like you can score 80 or higher while rolling stats!]

Oh yeah? Well you know what?! Screw you! Screw every last one of you Chads with all your Stacies and successful normie lives! This is my time to shine now! I will do it! I will beat this Reroll icon like it's my meat on a lonely Friday evening and I'll roll the best stats possible!

Okay, everyone ready? Hold on to your seats then, cause we're taking this icon for a ride!

3

(Sarcastically) Day 6524: rations running low.

I've been clicking and clicking and clicking for so long that my right hand went totally numb. And after every single click I made a brief pause to check the value that appeared on screen to be absolutely sure that I won't miss a good roll. Click, reroll, click, reroll, click, reroll, click, why am I doing this again? It's been so long that I 'm having difficulty remembering. And looking at those tiny digits on screen is such a pain in the ass… I continued my clicking crusade while thinking such thoughts. If nothing else, I have to praise myself for my own stubbornness.

Click, check the value, then click again. This boring, repetitive process continued for quite a while. Just a non-stop sound of clicking, like *click* *click* *click* *click* *click* *click* *click* *click* *click* *click* *click* *click* *click* *click**click* *click* *click* *click* *click* *click* *click* *click* *click*…

It wasn't until much, much later that the sight I longed for finally appeared on my screen: two digits making a number, shining with a clear, golden light. It took me a long time to get here, but the end result was even better than what I initially wanted. I rolled a highest value possible, probably because there are no three-digit numbers programmed into the system.

A 99. Just looking at it gave me all kinds of satisfaction. After the long struggle, I have finally arrived in the promised land. I did this out of spite and sheer desperation and still managed to obtain it. The days of yore when I just clicked away like a madman already seemed to be nothing more but a distant memory (even though they literally happened moments ago).

I have it. A total stat value of 99. Would I try to roll that again? Oh hell no. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity that might never repeat itself again if I just let it pass me by, so you bet your ass I'm keeping it. I don't even care about the game itself anymore, just rolling that was enough of a victory for me. Since I'll be playing solo anyway, such a roll was the best possible outcome I could have hoped for. There literally is nothing better than this when it comes to rolling stats, so I clicked on confirm without any regrets.

Next was setting up your avatar character and distributing Bonus Points. There was no information on microtransactions, loot boxes or any kind of in-game purchases. Could this be a browser-based game? Looking at the number of my bonus points, there were quite a lot of them. Well, since the game is being so generous to me from the start, I guess I have no choice but to continue playing and seeing how things will turn out.

Bonus Points themselves could be used to increase the values of various parameters on the character creation screen, such as Strength, Endurance, Equipment Load, Bonus Spells Slots and even Bonus Skills and Equipment. Initially I was thinking of dumping all of my Bonus Points into Strength, but that would mean I'll have no points to spend on other possibly useful things. Hmm, what to do?

Typically, in these kinds of games the benefits of increased parameters could only be felt in the game's early stages as the end result was dependent entirely on the character's overall level. Taking that into consideration, should I invest my points into something else? How about Bonus Equipment? I bet that with the right amount of points dumped into it I could start the game with the strongest weapons and armor from the get-go. That would certainly make the beginning stages a breeze. Bonus Spells could also be useful, especially those cool sounding like Warp or Gamma Ray Burst. Oh man, so many things to choose from and not nearly enough points to try out everything that actually catches my attention.

Normally I could've just used the internet to find some tips for beginners, but I got so caught up in setting everything up that I didn't even registered the actual name of the game, so I done goofed with that, I won't lie. Then again, that was kinda the point of what I'm doing here, to dive into it blindly and see if this is actually worth a damn. That, and I don't want to waste that one-in-a-million chance I got with that godly roll I managed to secure. Ugh, I have to hand it to the game's developers, putting so many things to choose from and giving you so many points was a brilliant trick, making the decision harder for me.

While I scanned the entire screen for any potential tips, I noticed that there was a [Reset Character] option at the bottom of the Bonus Skills list. So with this Bonus Skill, redoing your character should be available, right? And if this page is titled [Character Page 1], then it would stand to reason that I can either redo the same page or create another one if I want. That way, I can start playing essentially whatever I want without worrying too much.

I clicked on the Reset prompt to see if it actually works. Bonus Points Returned to 98, probably because one point was used to perform the reset itself. The necessary experience value has also decreased accordingly. Of course, I should know something like that is going to be necessary. But right next to it was a skill that increased the value of the experience obtained. But how is it any different? Should I choose both for the time being? Checking the required experience value reduction, the Bonus Points were at 97, and the required experience value decrease was displayed in half of the required experience value. It's an enhanced version with a reduced experience level, or an evolved version to be more exact.

If you click on the required experience value ½, the Bonus Points will drop down to 95, but the required experience will change to the ½ of the normal required value. Doing so again will change the required value to 1/3 of the original and repeating the process one more time drops the Bonus Points to 91 but changes the required experience value to 1/5. Doing so yet again will drop the Bonus Points to 83 but changes the required experience value to 1/10.

The number of my Bonus Points has been reduced. It would appear that the value of the Bonus Points required keeps on doubling. Clicking on the required experience value of 1/10 resulted in the Bonus Point total becoming 67 and the display changed to 1/20 of the required experience value. Quickmath time! 83 minus 67 gives… wait, how do you count to 16 again… Oh yeah, 16! So the value is doubling after all!

Now, what if I uncheck the required experience value of 1/20 and click to return the Bonus Point to 83 and the required experience value of 1/10, and then to the 91 Bonus Points and the required experience value of 1/5 and the once again to return it to 1/3. Ok, so this time I'm going to choose the increase in the acquisition of exp.

When I increased it, the Bonus Points became 90, and the display of the increase in the acquisition experience doubled. Is this the same pattern? When I repeat the process once more, the Bonus Points will be 88, and the earned experience value will change to triple the normal amount. When I clicked 3 times, the Bonus Points became

84, and 3 times the earned experience value changed to 5 times the earned experience value. I think I will actually go with that.

Other than that, there was also an option to pick a Second Job. This will without a doubt prove to be useful. Normally, in a job-based game, each job can use it's unique skills and spells. If you have a second job, you can use the skills and spells of those two jobs at the same time. It's strange that here it's treated like a Bonus Skill. If you don't set a Bonus Skill, you're going to lose its slot permanently. Fucking game choices man. This reeks of a shit-game mechanic, but I guess we have no choice. Once I picked that up, the value of Bonus Points decreased to 83. Two jobs at the same time will probably be all I'll be able to get at the start of the game, so if I decide to switch it for something else I can always reset at any given time.

Right next to the Second Job skill was a job settings skill. So I'm guessing that if I won't choose it, I'll be stuck with some lame default settings, huh? Let's leave it for now and check what other options do we have. Increased Recovery Speed and Shortened Spellcasting Speed may also be skills that can be useful, but since I don't know whether magic can be used from the beginning I'm skipping this for now. Discount Negotiations and Lowered Prices… that might be useful when I'll have to buy a lot of things.

As for the rest…

I think I'll pass any Bonus Spells for the time being, because some of them blatantly asked you if you're okay with performing suicide attacks. Big nope for me. I'm not going to use suicide attacks, no matter how OP they might be. Not in a million years.

Let's go back to Bonus Equipment for now. As far as the beginning of the game is concerned, this is going to be absolutely crucial. Wearing literally anything else that is not your starting equipment should be enough to make sure that you will not get owned throughout the beginning stages of the game. I clicked Bonus Equipment and then Bonus weapons, decreasing my number of Bonus Points to 82, changing my initial loadout simply called Weapons to Weapons II. So that is the pattern that the Bonus Equipment is following? Okay, fine by me. I clicked on it 6 times, expending a total of 20 Bonus Points to get myself a set of Weapons VI. Next I clicked on Bonus Accessories until my Bonus Points total was down to 17, and as a finishing touch, I increased the Lower Experience value to 1/5 of the normal total and increased the amount of exp obtained 5 times.

After all was said and done, the number of my remaining Bonus Point was 1. What

should I spend it on? Identify Skill, or maybe put one more into Bonus Weapons, just for the hell of it?

Nah, I'll go with Identify after all.

I have no Bonus Points left now. With nothing else left to do, I clicked OK to finish the character creation process, when all of a sudden, the screen has changed.

WARNING!

IF YOU CHOSE TO CONTINUE BEYOND THIS POINT, YOU WILL LIVE YOUR LIFE IN A DIFFERENT WORLD, NEVER TO RETURN TO THE WORLD YOU WILL BE LEAVING BEHIND.

KNOWING THIS, DO YOU STILL WISH TO CONTINUE?

The hell is this? Yeah, yeah, as long as I don't have to pay for it, I don't care. Just let me click yes and begin playing for fucks sake!

I click yes without a second of hesitation.

FINAL WARNING!

KNOWING THE RISK, DO YOU STILL WISH TO CONTINUE ANYWAY?

YES NO

Annoyed at the game's persistence, I clicked yes like a madman.

Huh? But wait a second… wasn't that message kinda disturbing now that I… think about… it…… Fuck…… what have I gotten…… myself…… into……

CHAPTER 1
THE FIRST VILLAGE

1

Player Name: Kaga Michio

Character Information & Equipment:

Class: Villager, Lv1

Weapon: Durandal

Accessory: Ring of Determination

It took me a while to realize that I was laying in a haystack. Why was I laying there and why in the haystack of all possible things I don't know and to be honest, I don't care. The most important thing right now is that I was apparently in some kind of barn or shed, hence the haystack. Last time I checked there was no barns or places that sold hay in Tokyo, so I have to think what the presence of all that hay around me means.

Commence the solo brainstorming session!

Okay, first things first, recollection of everything that I was doing yesterday. Most of the time I was bitching about how much dick Life has managed to stuff inside me up until now (just my typical day) and then I happened upon that sketchy post which led me to an even sketchier net game which I decided to check out in order to detach myself from all the shit I've been dealing with lately. Then I proceeded to create an account and my character (which took ages by the way, thanks to that needles clickfest with stats) and when I was finally about to start, I lost consciousness after reading that warning which appeared on my screen. Next thing I remember was waking up here, in this haystack.

So yeah, there you have it. In conclusion, I am just like that one who became a meme on the internet recently, I know nothing. Could it be that was somehow trans…

……

OH FUCK NO! THIS BETTER NOT BE AN ISEKAI STORY OR ELSE…!!!

Or else what?

Okay, all right, let's calm down and think about it rationally for a second. Instead of being transported into another world, it is more probable that I am inside some kind of virtual reality. Otherwise, why would I have to deal with all of that game related stuff in the first place? No way, something like that should be impossible with the current level of technology in our world. And how would that even work when all I did was basically a character creation process like in any other game? So what? Is it more like, I don't know, a dream? A very realistic lucid dream?

[Bruuuuuoooooo!] [Wah!]

At that time I heard the sound that I wasn't able to hear before, probably because I got too lost in my own thoughts. It wasn't anything that sounded hostile, but it did give me quite the scare. Something is here in that shed with me. Maybe I'll be able to see it if I just squint my eyes and concentrate.

Huh? What is that?

When I focused my gaze on the direction the noise was coming from, an information window was displayed directly in my mind, telling me that the source of the noise was apparently just an ordinary horse. When I got up on my feet and approached, the info turned out to be true, there really was a horse in one of the boxes near the entrance to the barn. Judging by the thickness of its legs it's not a Thoroughbred, but just a normal horse. Not that I could tell the difference even if I had both types in front of me, I'm just a normal guy, not a friggin horse-breeding expert.

As for the hut itself, it was probably the same size as your typical studio apartment, which is to say, quite spacious. Completely different to the apartment where I was living with my old man up to this point, which was approximately the size of 6×4 tatami mats. But enough talking about my dull, uninteresting past, I have more pressing matters to attend to right now, like looking around and assessing my surroundings. The inside of the shed was pretty dim, but from the spaces between the boards of the wooden walls and scarcely placed wooden windows I could see that the sky outside was still tinged with a slight shade of red. The question is, does that mean the night is

about to fall, or maybe the dawn is breaking to greet the new day? Other than me there are no people around. As I already said, the windows are the most basic wooden ones, without any glass or shutters.

The minutes passed and the horse eventually grew quiet, presumably drifting off to sleep. While we're still on the topic of that horse, I wonder if the information that were displayed in my mind were the result of the Identify skill.

Identify.

That was one of the skills that I picked up during the character creation process, that much I can remember. Well, now is as good of an opportunity as ever, so why not take that ability for a test drive? Thinking like that, I looked at myself and said the word [Identify] out loud, and sure enough, another information window popped right up. Let's see here… Kaga Michio, male, 17 years old, Villager Lv1… ohhhhh, so I guess this is my status then? Kaga Michio is my name, but… how does the game know that? I mean, that was not the name that I chose for my character when I was filling out the registration form yesterday! After all, even an unsociable loser like me knows the bare minimum of the net games etiquette that states that you should never use your real-life name while making a character in game! So how is it possible that my character's name is the same as my real name? Has my computer been hacked by some kinda super hacker who messed up with my game account as a sick joke?!

Perplexed, I examined my whole body, but I wasn't feeling any kind of discomfort anywhere, and everything I touched felt super real, as if it were made of real flesh instead of a bunch of 1's and 0's. I even have the same jersey I was wearing for an entire day yesterday, complete with food and sweat stains! Yup, no matter how I look at it, it is my body. Wow, to be able to reproduce every single detail of the player's looks and wardrobe, that is some seriously sick VR technology.

Since I was home all day yesterday I was also barefoot, feeling the hard ground with every inch of the soles of my feet. As for the temperature, the air around me is neither hot nor cold. I'm fine with having no shoes as long as I'll stay inside of here, but a lack of shoes might be a serious problem once I'll have to venture outside. Thankfully, looking around the shed for a while I managed to find something that upon closer inspection with my Identify skill turned out to be a pair of simple sandals. Since I don't have any socks on my feet then I might as well wear them. After all, it's certainly better than having no shoes at all. They were pretty primitive in their design, with strings that were supposed to be tied around the ankles to prevent them from falling off. As it

turned out, I still had to tie them up manually instead of just poking them with my finger with a motion imitating clicking. When I used Identify on my body again after everything was said and done, some new information appeared.

Kaga Michio, male, 17 years old, Villager Lv1, Thief Lv1, Equipment: Sandals

Uhm… that the name of that second job makes me feel like a bandit, and I probably am one for taking somebody else's possessions without asking them for permission first, but oh well, at least I've got a second job mere minutes into the game. By the way, my jersey does not seem to be classified as equipment. Is it because it was brought here from outside of the game? The only thing listed under the equipment tab are those sandals I have stolen. And speaking of equipping, I should have some Bonus Equipment on me right now.

Next to the haystack where I have woken up I found a room which contained a sword. Using Identify on it revealed that it was the Holy Sword Durandal and it came with a crapload of various skills, among which were the ones such as Attack Power x9 and Damage Absorption 25%, HP Absorption and MP Absorption. So this is what it means to have a Bonus Weapon 6, huh? Also, next to the sword I found a curious ring. I'm going to Identify it either way, but I wonder if it's going to give better benefits than Durandal? It says that it's a Ring of Determination. Those are some good items to start the game with.

I put on the ring and equip the sword. This further confirms my suspicion that this is indeed a game, since my actions have been confirmed in the character status screen. Once again, I'm amazed how detailed this virtual reality is.

Fixing my Durandal so that it would be attached to my belt just like the katanas worn by the samurai, my preparations were now complete.

Being fully equipped for the road that lies ahead of me, I decided to leave the stable and take my first step into this new, unknown world that was waiting for me outside. What am I going to find out there? I don't know, but maybe it won't be as bad as I initially thought, minus being labeled as a Sandals thief.

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The first thing I saw after I left the barn was the early morning scenery of a peaceful country village. The buildings consisted mostly of one storied wooden houses

surrounded with vegetable gardens. The eastern side of the village consisted of vast open fields, while the northern part housed a large forest. It looks like the villagers begin their daily activities fairly early, because even though the sun had just risen over the horizon, some of them were already up and about, walking down the simple, stone-paved road.

I don't know if I should hide from them or not, but just to be on the safe side I've chosen to hide behind the barn for now. There are still too many things that I don't know that being cautious sounded like the best possible course of action for now. After all, I don't know who these people are and if they are friendly to outsiders or not, and there's also a matter of me stealing (although by accident) those sandals from inside the barn. I don't know about you, but for me the prospect of having my hand cut off as a punishment for theft was not a welcoming one. So in order to avoid attracting unnecessary attention to myself I decided to wait and observe the villagers form the shadows and use Identify on the couple which happened to pass by the barn on their way to the fields. It told me that both of them had only a first name without any last names, didn't have any Jobs except for [Villager] and were both at Lv1. In other words, they were your typical, run-of-the-mill NPCs (Non-Player Characters).

While we're at it, I am also at Lv1. Sooner or later I'll have to do something about it.

I decide to enter the forest from the side of the barn and observe the village from there. That way I'll be able to continue my investigation of the surroundings without having to worry about getting caught by anyone.

The village itself was actually quite large, stretching way into the southwest direction. The total number of houses in the whole thing should be around thirty to forty. The village's very center was the place where most of the two- and three-story houses were located. Squinting my eyes to see better, I used Identify on the people who were currently coming out of them. Just like before, they had only one name and one Job listed, but not all of them were labeled simply as [Villagers]. Among all the people were a total of five [Farmers]. I don't know what made them different from the regular village-dwellers, maybe the fact that they were more effective at cultivating the land? Man it sure as hell would be swell if there actually was some kind of tutorial here that would explain all of the basics to me, but I guess that is too much to ask for, huh? For now I guess I'll just have to make do with Identify alone.

Now to continue my monitoring.

The person with the highest level was a Lv25 older-looking dude. Should I try talking to him, or perhaps settle my sights on someone with a lower level, just in case that things could really go south? Let's see now… I spy with my little identifying eye that the person who was 8 levels below the one with Lv25 was actually the village's chief who's apparently 69 years old. Heh, 69, such a neato number.

In addition to him there was also someone with Lv6 who appeared to be a merchant, but it was hard to tell if he was a traveling one or the owner of the village's general store. Either way, he must be one of the more financially stable members of the community here since he walked out of one of the few three-story buildings in the neighborhood.

I wanted to investigate some more, but unfortunately any further attempts ad doing as such have been interrupted by a pair of high-pitched voices echoing through the calm, early morning air. They belonged to two people who left the village perimeter some while ago and now they were running back with all their strength, literally screaming their throats out. Unfortunately for me they were both too far away for me to hear what exactly was going on in here, but I found out soon enough.

One by one, the villagers rushed back into their homes, only to emerge back with weapons, mainly swords and spears, in hand. Don't tell me…

Don't tell me someone actually saw me and they were preparing to lynch me! Are you fucking serious?! For a measly crime of stealing a pair of used sandals that are not even all that comfortable to begin with?!

At least that's what I had initially thought, but thankfully that does not seem to be the case this time, since the villagers weren't converging on my location, running towards the east instead. Hiding behind the trees, I quietly follow after them to what all the commotion was about.

After around two minute of walking, I finally saw it. A large cloud of dust approaching the village from the eastern road, followed by intimidating shouts and the rumbling of hooves against the beaten ground.

It was a bandit raid. It wasn't just my assumption based on my knowledge of the tropes from games set in medieval times and audio clues, oh no. I took my time to scan them with Identify, and even though they were still so far away from me that they looked like nothing more but the grains of rice, it showed me that each and every one of them

had [Bandit] listed as his Job. Man, the reach of that skill is seriously OP.

Also, thanks to that I was finally able to grasp the situation I found myself in. All the signs pointed towards only one possible conclusion:

This is a [Tutorial Quest: Bandit Raid!] On a side note, this is not a name that I have come up with on the fly. The information window that just appeared before my eyes literally called it like that.

Since this is a tutorial quest, I should be able to complete it without any major difficulties, since the levels of the Bandits are generally quite low, single digit ones. Even if I myself am only at Lv1, there is no way in hell that I could lose an introductory battle like that! Not when I also have a Holy Sword Durandal on my side!

The Bandit's equipment consisted primarily of Copper Swords, the same as the ones possessed by the villagers and simple Leather Armors. A high-end weapon like Durandal should eat them for breakfast in no time.

All the villagers stopped just some distance away from the barn I was initially hiding behind and took assumed their positions, waiting for the Bandits to approach them. I look towards them once more to confirm their numbers. Most of the villagers were present, including the Lv25 village's head. What are the chances of them besting a group of bloodthirsty cutthroats? If you say [not very high] then I'm afraid I have to agree with you, especially after taking Identifying the Bandits and their Leader form up close.

Bandit Leader Hugo

Male, 38 years old

Job: Bandit,

Equipment: Iron Sword, Bandit Bandana, Iron Armor, Leather Shoes

Yeah, no doubts about it. The guy in the middle must be their Leader. His level is exceptionally high and his equipment looks to be more luxurious when compared to the rest of the band around him, who wore the standard stuff. Level-wise, the Leader was at 19 and someone who looked like his right hand was at 11 respectively, and the rest of them were single digit ones. Could this be because this is the first event in the game? Well, no use thinking about it now. For now, let's just adopt the following

mindset: everything is going to be all right as long as I'll be careful enough not to get hit by any of the Leader's attacks.

The moment the Bandits finally reached the village, a fierce battle commenced, and the best way I can describe it was: chaotic. Unintelligible shouts and screams filled the air as both Bandits and villagers were slashing away at each other with their swords and it quickly turned into a situation where I couldn't clearly tell one side apart from the other. All I knew was that the battle itself was slowly moving towards me in the forest, so if I timed my actions right, I could probably jump out and land a few surprise attacks here and there.

Both of the sides were pretty even, one not being able to overwhelm the other to claim the decisive victory even though the fight itself was going for a while now, developing a clear standstill. The same was true for the bandits Leader and the village chief, but because the chief's level was higher than that of the Bandit Leader, it's only a matter of time before he comes out on top. However…

One of the horse-riding Bandits came between the two Leaders, distracting the chief and enabling the Bandit Leader to perform a thrusting attack which made his sword penetrate deep into the chief's body.

What was that technique?! It looked like the Leader stabbed the chief through the gaps between the elements of his armor, but could something like that really be pulled off by a thug like him? I heard that such a technique really existed and was utilized mainly by the master swordsman fighting against armored opponents to strike at their vital points, but only a selected few managed to master completely master it.

Wounding the chief like that, the Bandit Leader totally has him on his mercy, looking down on him and grinning in a very unsettling way. But now that his eyes are focused on him and no one else, maybe that was the opportunity I was waiting for?

I feel that now would be a good chance for me to sneak behind him unnoticed and stab him through the heart with my Durandal. Something is telling me that an attack like that would deal a considerable amount of damage, possibly even killing him on the spot.

I slowly remove the Durandal from its sheath on my waist and squeeze its handle with both my hands. It is much heavier than a wooden sword I was so used to carrying, but not to a degree where I couldn't swing it around since my muscles have been thoroughly

trained through years of Kendo practice. Also, I keep telling myself in my head that since it is a first in-game event, there is no way for me to die in it.

I have to do it. I have to go. It's either now, or never.

So I take a deep breath…

…and I dash out of the forest straight into the heat of battle!

3

I can no longer hear the surrounding sounds. I don't know who screams what anymore. I simply run straight ahead with the intention of attacking the Bandit Leader.

One of the bandits noticed me as I was on my way and jumped at me to stop me, so I had no choice but to slash him twice before he would do the same to me. I think his level is Lv2. As he was falling onto the ground I didn't even pay him any attention, I just raised Durandal up and resumed my advance. I simply continued to run while striking down those who would stand in my way, and after I jumped over the bodies of some fallen Bandits I've finally found myself next to their leader, who had still failed to notice me due to the commotion from the battles around him. I tightened my grip on the sword's handle, and with my feet planted firmly in the ground I performed a spinning slash aimed at the Bandit Leader's neck. When he realized what was going on, it was already too late for him to do anything. Durandal struck him dead in the neck, cleaving it as if it was made of butter and sending his head flying high into the air before it finally fell at his feet. The expression on his face was that of utter shock and disbelief. But that was not important to me now. The important thing was the blood that gushed out of the place where the decapitated head was just moments ago, and let me tell you, it was like a fountain… Oh wow… o-oh, shit… oh fuck why is it not stopping already?! Why does it keep on splashing around?!

No! Michio, stop acting like a bitch-ass pussy and get a grip already! You don't have the luxury of standing around admiring the gory details! There are still Bandits around who are in desperate need of a beating!

I did just like I said and engaged the other enemies. They were all felled by a single blow of my Holy Sword. With each swing another bloody fountain was created, sending scarlet droplets into the air, culling down the enemy's numbers.

Once all of the small fries were finely chopped like the pieces of logwood, my attention turned to the second strongest Bandit, the one who looked like their Leader's right hand. Together with a couple more of his goons he was attacking a group of villagers who formed a defensive formation around their chief, who somehow managed to get back on his feet after that critical attack between the pieces of his armor. When I approached them, one of them screamed something to the others while pointing towards me. The second-in-command also looked at me and also started screaming, after which he and all of his remaining men began to run with their tails tucked between their legs. Looks like my little sneak attack also managed to inflict some sick psychological damage as well.

Now that they have turned their backs on me, this is another perfect chance. I started to chase after them, slaughtering anyone who's back had the misfortune of bumping into Durandal's pointy end, until I happened upon the third strongest man among the entire group of bandits, the one who was Lv11. Without saying anything he just assumed a fighting stance and charged at me, slashing at me from left to right and right to left in an attempt to overwhelm me with a barrage of blows. I managed to block some of them, but the rest I was forced to dodge by rolling backwards and to the sides like a mad acrobat. This opponent is wearing better armor than the rest of the Bandits, so I won't be able to defeat him by just swinging my sword around randomly. I grabbed Durandal's handle with both of my hands again and also assumed my stance. If there's one thing I learned from my kendo lessons, it is that when you are fighting against an armored opponent, your moves are all that's important.

He tried to slash me from above, so I quickly sidestepped and slashed him on the wrist, wounding it severely. Durandal is truly strong, being able to inflict such wounds with such a shallow cut. However, the Bandit ignored the blood dripping from his wrist and attacked me again. I prepared myself to block and counter it, but it turned out that he was just feinting that attack. His real aim was to swing his bleeding hand at me so that the blood from the wound splash into my eyes, momentarily blinding me. Of course, he used that chance to get away.

Right now, all of the bandits were in full retreat mode, running for their lives like the little bitches they were. So I guess the likes of them are only tough when they are absolutely sure of their advantage. What a bunch of losers.

Before they completely retreated, I finished off as many of them as I could. None of them posed a threat to me now, not when they were exposing their backs to me as they were trying to get away. Eventually only a handful of them managed to flee, but I

still managed to earn quite a lot of experience points in the end, so I think that it was all worth the trouble.

“Fuuu~~”

Breathing a sigh of relief after the battle was over, I just sat down right where I stood. Even if this is only a game, all that moving around was still pretty tiring, just like in real life, so I need a moment to calm myself down from all that battle high. Little by little, the sound of the surroundings are flowing into my ears again as I look around the battlefield to get the grasp of the situation. As one might have expected, the whole field is littered with corpses, mostly the bandit ones, and the pools of spilt blood. Not a pretty sight at all, I can tell you that. And by the looks of it, the bodies of the dead are not going to disappear immediately. What an unnecessary bit of realism. I wonder if it’s something that the beta testers overlooked. Then again, do VR games even have beta testers to being with? Or maybe I am doing the testing right now? If that is indeed the case, then maybe I should file a complaint to the developers.

As I was contemplating what should be the contents of my complaint, the village chief approached me.

“I don’t know what to say, oh brave stranger.”

I glanced at him when he finished talking. Even though the language setting was that Brahim or whatever, the first word was totally incomprehensible to me, but with every next word I could understand what he was saying more clearly.

“Oh, forgive my rudeness. Tell me, do you speak Brahim, stranger?”

“I know it to some extent.”

I replied to him.

“Ohh, and you speak it so fluently even though you’re not looking like a local. Are you perhaps an Adventurer?”

“Perhaps” my ass! It should be obvious at first glance!

“Well, I guess you could say that.”

I politely confirmed his suspicions. After all, I don’t want to make him my enemy by

being unnecessarily rude or secretive. If possible, I want to build friendly relations with them because who knows, maybe I'll be able to benefit from it quite a bit?

"Thank you for saving our village from those filthy brigands. You have our undying gratitude, young Adventurer."

"No need to thank me. I just did what everyone else would do if they were placed in such a situation."

I tried to brush it off as if it were the most natural thing to do. Also, something about this whole situation seemed awfully fishy to me. For someone of his age and level, the village chief appeared to be almost too humble to me. Why would he use such a polite tone and words when talking to a Lv1 brat like me? Okay, I get that I probably saved his life and all, but even for something like that it seems to be a little too much.

"Please, allow me to reward you for your bravery and selflessness. Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Hmm, let me think… oh, then, if it isn't too much trouble, I don't have any place to stay, so maybe you could do something about that?"

Although it is a game, the fatigue I felt was very much real. For virtual reality that's quite an achievement. Other than that, I simply didn't want to stay here on this battlefield anymore than it was absolutely necessary. I wanted to leave it as fast as possible.

"Come stay at my house then. My name is Somala and I'm the chief of this village."

Identify told me the same. His Job was really listed as Village Chief.

"My name is Kaga Michio. Pleased to meet you and thank you for your kind offer."

"XXX father! XXXXXXXXXXXXX."

I couldn't understand most of the conversation between the village chief and the villagers, even though I could understand the chief himself quickly. Just what is going on in this game?

"Are there many people here who can speak Brahim?"

"That would be just me and the village trader."

“Is that so?”

“I must say, you’re quite amazing, Michio-sama. You’re able to speak Brahim even though you’re so young!”

Is that really something so amazing? And by the way, Brahim is not Japanese. Far from it, actually, it is a language that sounds like everything but Japanese. But for some bizarre reason I was able to understand those who also knew how to speak it. As for everyone else, even if they spoke to me, I couldn’t understand a single word they were saying. Looks like I will only be able to hold a conversation with the village chief and that other person.

Looking at the chief, I have to say that he didn’t look like someone who’s a Lv25, and a former Adventurer at that. I mean, Village Chief was the only Job he had listed, so maybe in this game your status changes in real-time depending on the choices you make and the actions you take?

While we’re at it, let’s have another look at my own status.

Kaga Michio, Male, 17 years old

Jobs: Villager Lv2 Thief: Lv2

Equipment: Holy Sword Durandal, Ring of Determination, Sandals

Sweet, looks like the levels of my jobs went up as a result of that battle earlier. Well since it was as fierce as it was then what did you expect? My only gripe would be that after killing so many Bandits I only managed to gain a single level in each of my jobs. Looks like grinding levels is going to be a serious pain in the ass.

By the time I finished the inspection of my status we had already arrived at the Chief’s house.

4

“X X X X X X X X X X X X X.”

“X X X X X X X X X X X X X X.”

“You must be tired after the battle, Michio-sama. I’ll have my wife prepare a bath of hot water for you, so until it is ready please make yourself at home.”

“All right. Thank you, and sorry for the trouble.”

The Chief had a little exchange with his wife which I totally couldn’t understand, and then he urged me to come inside with him.

The entire thing was a two-story building build in western style. Based on what I have seen up until now, it looks like the civilization in this game is not all that advanced. My guess is that technologically they should be at the level of our Middle Ages at best? I mean, I haven’t seen anyone using a gun so far, but I didn’t see anyone using a bow either, so I guess the exact specifics will have to be determined later.

From the entrance alone it became apparent that inside this house was much bigger than it looked from the outside. Immediately upon entering, I was guided to a small side-room and told to sit down.

“Please wait here while we will get everything ready.”

“Okay, I’ll be sure to do just that.”

“Now, if you’ll excuse me…”

It was a simple room with almost no furniture in it, probably serving as some kind of a storeroom, so before the Chief left me there to wait he handed me a wooden board so that I could sit on it. Well, I was hoping to at least get myself a chair, but that is fine as well. Everything is better than freezing my ass off on the cold hard ground.

“Phew……”

I sighed without even realizing it. Well, as far as the first times in games go, this was certainly an intense one, but I think now that we have reached our “Rest Period” after successfully completing the tutorial event would be a great time to call it a day and log out.

……Wait, how do you do that again? Maybe there is a button, or a prompt somewhere within my field of vision…… nope, no good. Then maybe I have to move my hand or fingers in a specific motion, like in that one famous VRMMO… nah, that was not it either…

……Huh?

But no, seriously now, how the fuck do I log out of this goddamn game?! No, no no no no no no, don't tell me I can't log out!?

I was beginning to panic. Thinking about it, I really didn't know how am I supposed to log out of this game. There was nothing about it before or after the character creation process, and certainly no information windows with that crucial details appeared when the game started. But then… how am I supposed to go back to reality?

"Log Out!"

I shouted, but nothing happened. No forced pause, no time stopping around me, nothing. The game's world just continued onward.

"Log Off! End! Stop! System! Options! Main Menu! Save & Quit!"

Still nothing.

"Main Menu! Menu! Exit to the Main Menu! Exit Options! Window! Open Window! Menu Window! Exit Window! Memory! Save! Quit! Save & Quit! Quit Without Saving!"

I tried saying every combination possible that came to my mind, and still nothing happened. At this rate, I will really be unable to return to reality from this fucking shit game!

But… Can I really call this a game at this point? Because all of my senses were telling me that everything around me was 100% real. There was no room for doubts. This couldn't have been a mere dream or some cheap fabrication, not with that level of attention to every little detail.

And anyway, if this really is a virtual reality that is practically indistinguishable from the real world, then how is this possible that something like that hasn't been covered by the media?! I mean, can you imagine?! That would make this game the very first to offer a full virtual reality experience!

……No. As awesome as that would be, it's just not possible. After all, I didn't use any VR gear to start playing. All I did was opening a browser, clicking on a link and finishing the character creation process. That's something even a trained monkey could pull off.

And yet here I am. In a world that is clearly not real, but it looks, smells and feels like real.

For all I know, this might be the real world, and the life I was living up until now was nothing more than a cruel simulation. But then… why would I think that this was a game? My Identify Skill came to my mind. A tool that allowed me to view myself as if I was watching from a third person perspective and all the information about me, something like that was possible only in games.

However, as I finished inspecting every part of my body, I finally noticed it.

All the blood that my jersey was stained with.

If it was a game, something like that would never have happened. And it wouldn't have that nauseating smell! Blood would have just fly into the air and fall to the ground where it would have simply disappeared after a while or turned into a myriad of pixels and evaporated.

So which is it? A game world, or a real world? Where am I? What Is going on here?! I guess it doesn't really matter all that much. Without a way to log out of it, what difference does it really make? If I am stuck here without any option to bail out, then it means that this has become my new reality.

WARNING!

IF YOU CHOSE TO CONTINUE BEYOND THIS POINT, YOU WILL LIVE YOUR LIFE IN A DIFFERENT WORLD, NEVER TO COMEBACK TO THE WORLD YOU WILL BE LEAVING BEHIND.

KNOWING THIS, DO YOU STILL WISH TO CONTINUE?

That was the last memory of my own world that I had. That ominous message which appeared at the end of the character creation process. It was way too dubious to be part of the actual game, and admittedly I was pretty tilted at that time so I kinda neglected it and clicked yes without really thinking it through.

That's why I can be entirely sure this is a game world or not. If this is the game world just like it was described on the main site, then the warning given at the end could certainly be true.

"Please excuse me."

While I was thinking so hard on it, the village Chief came to me together with a woman who looked like she might have been his wife. She was carrying a large wooden bowl filled with water and a towel in her hands.

"Aa, aaah."

"Michio-sama, please use this hot water and towel to cleanse yourself off the battle's filth."

His wife placed the bowl in front of me and handed me the towel, or to be more precise, a piece of cloth that was supposed to be the towel.

"My wife also prepared a change of clothes for you. What you are wearing right now is dirty, so let us wash it for you."

"Thank you, and sorry for the trouble."

And a change of clothes was placed in front of me.

At first I thought that that woman might be the village Chief's servant, but by using Identify I confirmed that she was indeed his wife at the age of sixty-six. Completing

the task she was given, she left the room together with her husband.

When I was finally left alone again, I took off my clothes and wiped myself with the ragged cloth-towel. Looking at my jersey, it was completely littered with red stains. The blood of all the Bandits I have killed, and it didn't look like it was going to disappear anytime soon without a thorough wash. Well, what did you expect, Michio? This is apparently not a game, so of course it won't disappear.

Not a game huh? Because sure, real life allows you to Identify other people after looking at them and carry up to six weapons. Yeah, right.

FINAL WARNING!

KNOWING THE RISK, DO YOU STILL WISH TO CONTINUE ANYWAY?

Okay, okay, I admit, this really is another world that is just like the game I was supposed to play. Also, I admit that I tried to run away from reality and look away from the facts I should have easily acknowledged. And what is the most common way of escaping reality in video games?

Murdering the shit out of everyone who comes your way.

If this is really a game, then I just killed a number of game characters, even though they were mere Bandits. But if it's not a game, then the ones I have killed were actual people. What I did earlier, my heroic charge forward coupled with slicing the Bandits into fine pieces, would simply be called a brutal murder if this was the real world. So for the safety of my own mind, I want to think that this world is a game, even though it might as well be nothing more than wishful thinking.

……

……

"……"

I can't. I just can't ignore what I did earlier. I have to accept it. This is reality, and I just committed a murder. I killed people. I took and ended people's lives, thinking they were just some mobs from a game! That's horrible! Utterly unforgivable.

But all in all unavoidable, the more I think about it.

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Yeah, that's right. I shouldn't allow something like that to bother me at all! In a medieval setting events like that are an everyday occurrence, so there's no sense in getting depressed over them if it was just a first from many more that will probably come my way. If I won't be able to at least do that, then I probably won't be able to go on living in this world.

I take a deep breath and make my decision.

From now on, this is my reality. A place where I'll have to live from today onward, and in order to live, I will definitely have to get my hands dirty, so I cannot be afraid of doing it. Do whatever it takes for me to survive. And speaking of surviving, there actually is a way for me to confirm my suspicions of this world being a game.

The Character Reset option.

What came to my mind was the Character Reset screen. As if I was sitting in front of a computer screen, I was able to see the images of how all of my stats would look if I decided to reset my character and all of his skills. As expected, resetting all of the stat points and Bonus Skills would be not very effective, because contrary to the character creation process a reset cannot be performed over and over again on one character page until you would achieve a desired result, and all of the changes would be apparently applied in-world without logging me out, so there goes my hope of bypassing the rules set by the system to no-way-fag my way out of this predicament.

So according to the system warning I have received at the end of the character creation process I have made a decision to permanently leave Japan and begin my life anew in another world. But here's the thing: it wasn't exactly my conscious, thoroughly thought-out decision, but rather one made while being tilted and annoyed that I couldn't begin playing already and just smashing the okay icon with my mouse. Had I known it was going to end like that, I would have never clicked that blasted OK button and just moved on with my life, probably to find myself a new game to play, preferably the one that would be less sketchy then this one.

Anyway, currently I had 1 Bonus Point left to use for some reason. I should have used up all of the ones I had, but maybe I overlooked this one? Ah, whatever. I guess I should just drop the whole resetting thing and leave my character as it is, at least for the time being and change into the clothes the village Chief prepared for me.

But really now, is the way back to the real Japan closed for me forever? If that warning was for real, then I guess that was really it for me. I can't go back and that's final. And oddly enough, that might end up working surprisingly well for me, since I was contemplating whether or not I should kill myself in the first place. Back in Japan, nothing is really waiting for me to return. Not the school where I had no friends nor my abusive shit-of-a-father.

Thinking about it, what was keeping me alive there anyway? Was it the need to see the next issue of all the mangas I was reading or the taste of the meat buns from the bakery that was near where I lived? Because if so, then I have to say: Kaga Michio, those were some legitimately crappy reason for continuing to put up with the dicking that Life was handling to you.

Will I really live in this world? Can I do it? The clothes the Chief presented me with were too large for me and didn't fit me at all. They were rough and itchy and not comfortable at all, just like that ragged towel I had to wipe myself with. I guess another thing I will have to say goodbye to will be the soft and comfortable Japanese clothing I was wearing my whole life. Ehh, it's fine, it's fine. Just another compromise I will have to get used to. Besides, if all of the villagers were wearing them then that has to mean they are not as bad as they look. I just have to stop being so nitpicky about everything and thank him for letting me borrow his clothes. I tried to use Identify on them, but apparently normal clothing was not considered an item by the game's systems. I have to make sure to remember that there is such a distinction, but for now there are more important things I have to focus my attention on.

For the time being I guess I should remove Durandal from the items I have equipped on me. It is a great sword. An amazing sword. A very powerful sword. I fully realized that during that earlier fight.

Which is exactly why it can become the target of thieves or other bandits. If this is a game, then it probably won't get stolen, because it should be safe in the space of my personal inventory, but it'll be an entirely different story if this is not a game. For now it is my only weapon, so if I lose it I will be in such a deep shit that I don't even want to imagine it. I think that the best course of action in regards to that will be to sleep with one eye open, just in case someone tried to pull a sneaky on me with their sticky fingers.

In regards to that, I am curious about the sandals I am wearing right now, because technically they are someone's property which I have unlawfully appropriated upon

my awakening in this world. So if somebody else's sandals can become mine when stolen, then the same can probably be applied to my Durandal. So just like in real life, stealing can go both ways here, except for the fact that if I get my Durandal stolen for me it will be equivalent to losing 63 of my Bonus Points which I've spent to get it, and if there's one thing I can consider to be my ally in this strange, unfamiliar world, that would be Bonus Points, without a doubt. Those 99 points I have received at the beginning helped me out tremendously in gaining a good head-start, so I absolutely have to make sure I will treasure every single one of them I can get from now on.

Another thing that I have to be wary of is the possibility that those who might want to steal Durandal from me might do it the easiest way possible: by killing me, its owner in order to obtain it, which brings us to the next issue: how is death treated in this world? When I die, will I just be revived in the nearest church or cathedral with a little less gold in my pocket and lowered experience value, or is death treated here the same way as it was in my world, something final that cannot be undone by any means? In any case, I shouldn't be going around with my holy sword on full display like that all the time if I want to avoid trouble. Worst case scenario, I will simply use the reset option to get rid of it. If I won't be able to use it anymore, no one else will!

But wait, will I even be able to just delete it after it will be stolen from me?

Okay, time for a little test.

I tried resetting my character in such a way that it didn't have Durandal, that is by not putting enough Bonus Points in the Bonus Weapons category. As a result, the Ring of Determination which I was wearing on my finger got removed. So it's just like I suspected, huh? Looks like if Durandal is indeed stolen from me, both the stat bonuses it was giving me and Bonus Points required to obtain it will be wasted.

After performing another reset to get Durandal back, I just stood with it for a while, contemplating my options here. For now I removed Bonus Weapon 6 from my skill list, making Durandal disappear.

Okay, now that that's done maybe I should twiddle with the Jobs settings for a bit. I imagined my character status screen in my head and moved to the list of Jobs I had available. Currently there were 3 of them.

Villager Lv2

Thief Lv2

Hero Lv1

That third one, Hero was not present when I awakened, so I'm guessing it must have unlocked after the battle with the Bandits? I wonder if it's maybe because the Chief saw me as a hero after I helped him? All right, let's examine that new class of mine a little bit closer, shall we?

Hero Lv1

Class Effect: Heroic Bravery – Raises the value of each statistic by 10 points

Class Skill: Overwhelm

Looks like a pretty good Job to me, definitely efficient in terms of stat bonuses it provides. As for the acquisition… since I obtained the Thief Job by stealing a pair of sandals, then I truly must have acquired the Hero Job after defeating those Bandits. Will I have to level this job up by performing other heroic deeds? And I wonder if the stat boosts are going to keep increasing with class levels? Because even at Lv1 it's waaaaay better than those of the other two, but I guess that was to be expected from a class reserved exclusively for heroes. As for the other two, the Villager Job grants only a slight boost to the STR stat and does not grant any additional skills to go along with it, so in my book it's literally the thrashiest of all Jobs. The Thief Job was somewhat better than the Villager, except for the fact that instead of a slight STR increase it offered a boost to AGI stat, but it also had no skills associated with it. In conclusion, those two starting classes suck so much ass that it's actually unbelievable how bad they are.

All right, that settles it, I'll perform the character reset again since I managed to acquire that third Job. This time maybe I'll try to build myself around it and put all the remaining Bonus Points into the experience-based skills. Yeah, that sounds like a good plan.

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Kaga Michio: Human Male 17 years old

Jobs: Villager Lv2 Thief Lv2 Hero Lv1 Equipment: Sandals

After completing the character I reset, I used Identify on myself. I now had three Jobs.

But wait a minute, shouldn't Hero be the first one? I tried switching Hero with Villager, but it did nothing. So what, you trying to tell me that only Villager and Thief can be set as the first Job? Why is that?! Eh, this sucks major ass, but no helping it I guess. Let's just set Hero as the second Job and Thief as the third one, which has apparently advanced to Lv2.

"I'm sorry to bother you, Michio-sama, but may I have a moment of your time?"

The Village Chief came to see me again.

"Sure, I don't mind. What do you need?"

I don't know about you, but to me the Chief's attitude started to feel a little bit too humble, almost as if he tried too hard to kiss my ass. I know he probably feels extremely grateful to me for saving his life, but that's going too far, even by my standards. I know that with Durandal's power I was able to cut those bandits down like grass in the garden, but that doesn't make me almighty or anything like that. If he thinks that from now on my presence here is going to be everything they will need to keep other bandits away from attacking the village, then I hate to break it to him but he's sorely mistaken. No matter what, the village needs to stay vigilant. Then again, maybe that is exactly why he is like that to me. Maybe he thinks that by getting on my good side, he will be able to convince me to become the village's protector?

Ugh, this is shaping up to be even more annoying than I had initially anticipated. I wonder if there's anything I can do to avoid having to deal with such a major headache?

"The breakfast will be served later, but first I would like you to join me outside. We have gathered all of the bandit's equipment that was left after you disposed of them and I would be honored if you could inspect it with me and the other villagers."

"All right, I'll do it."

Now this is getting interesting. Inspection? What for? Are we going to distribute the leftover bandit gear between ourselves? Because if so, then I should have the right to claim the equipment of every Bandit that I have personally slain as my own. If I'm lucky, maybe some of them had some good stuff on them that I could use, but if not, I'll just allow the villagers to have it. Maybe they'll be able to sell it for a good price, which would in turn score me some brownie points with them.

“Then please, follow me.”

“Sure, but is it really okay for me to claim part of the gear as my own?”

But just to be on the safe side, I decided to ask the Chief about it.

“Of course. By the right of taking, the equipment of every man you defeated is yours for the taking, Michio-sama!”

“Good.”

So I was right and he just confirmed my suspicions. I also managed to learn about one of the laws governing this world: essentially, belongings of every person you kill are yours. I think it checks out with the setting, unless those are the medieval times with added law enforcement and judiciary systems like those in the present day Japan.

“This time my fellow villagers managed to defeat two of the Bandits. Therefore I’ll have to oversee the process of distributing their belongings between them to ensure that everyone will get his equal share and… I hope I won’t overstep my boundaries, Michio-sama, but if it so happened that none of your share of equipment would be to your liking, would you please consider sharing it with us?”

Wow, all those villagers managed to defeat only two Bandits? This is so laughable that it’s not even funny. Then again, I have to keep in mind that they fought against them armed with nothing more than simple weapons and farming tools, while I was slashing away at them with a fricking Holy Sword.

“I understand your situation. If it’s going to help you, I don’t mind sharing some of my spoils.”

Until I learn all of this world’s customs properly my best course of action would be to follow any of the suggestions I am given, as long as they are not too absurd, of course. I know technically I was the reason they managed to keep their homes and families safe, but hogging all the spoils of war to myself would be a total dick move. Think of the long term consequences here. With their current weaponry, they barely managed to defeat two of the Bandits while my Durandal did the rest for them. But when I will leave this village to move forward with my new life, there will be no one who they will be able to rely on but themselves and for that, the are going to need everything they can get their hands on.

“Thank you! On behalf of all the villagers, thank you from the bottom of my heart!”

Man, I am really not used to people thanking me for anything.

“Don’t worry about it, I just did what anyone else would do if they were in my place.”

I somehow managed to squeeze that lame line out of my throat. Okay, on to the next point of business. Since my Identify is a Bonus Skill I don’t think someone like the Chief is going to have something similar to, so maybe I’ll make myself useful by helping them sort the things that might be genuinely useful from the ordinary pieces of junk. On a completely unrelated side note…

The villagers seem to be taking me for someone who’s Level is above 30.

During that earlier battle, the Villagers and the bandits were all more or less the same level, which was about 25, although some of the Bandits were obviously higher than that, considering the overall Kills/Deaths ratio of both sides. So considering that I myself am at first levels in all of my Jobs, it will be no exaggeration to say that my Holy Sword Durandal has basically hard-carried me throughout my first battle. That is just how OP of a weapon it is.

We went to the outskirts of the village where the battle with the bandits took place. Their equipment was placed on the ground there, waiting for us, guarded by one of the villagers. Could this be this Lv6 merchant, the one who could speak the Brahim language?

“This fine man here is Pitzker, the only merchant in our village.”

“The name’s Pitzker, just like the Chief said. Young man, Allow me to express my deepest gratitude for saving our village from those brigands earlier.”

“Michio. I haven’t done anything special, so please stop exaggerating.”

“As you wish. This here is the Bandit’s equipment that we managed to salvage.”

Taking a closer look, I saw all the Leather Armors, shoes and weapons carried by the Bandits that we have slain.

“Ahh, yes, thank you. Let us rejoice and praise the young hero who defeated most of the Bandits by himself! Now, these items here…”

“I don’t care.”

I am not interested in the part of the items that belongs to the two villagers. All I care about is my part of the loot.

“Michio-sama, do you have enough space?”

“Space?”

Fuck, this is the terminology I know nothing about! What about having enough space?!

“Oh, I beg your pardon, have I spelled something wrong in Brahim? Allow me to rephrase then. Do you have enough inventory space for all the items you are eligible to?”

“Hmm, you’re right. It might not be enough for so many items.”

I don’t understand. Isn’t the space in the inventory I already have enough?

“Really? Isn’t Michio-sama an Adventurer?”

“Well, something along those lines.”

Does this world have some kinda special definition of who Adventurers are? Come on Michio, whatever you do now, just don’t let them know that you have no clue what they are talking about. Keep your mask of deception on and don’t let it fall off no matter what.

“Well, then you should be able to access your Item Box. Isn’t that how you equipped that wonderful sword of yours which you used to get rid of those Bandits?”

Chief offered me a helping hand. So is that what an Item Box is? It would be hellishly sweet if that was actually the case.

Come to think of it, when I performed a character reset, my Durandal was unequipped off me. So based on what the Chief was telling me, it must have gone somewhere.

“Item Box, open. Item Space, open. Inventory, open. Tool Bag, open.”

I tried using spoken commands again, but just like last time I tried it, big fat nothing happened. Am I doing something wrong here? Or is the spelling different? Anyway, the conclusion for now is that I do not know how to open an Item Box. And to add to the list of my problems (which was growing rapidly), both the Village Chief and the merchant were giving me suspicious looks.

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Look, I know I must be looking suspicious as fuck right now, okay? I realize that and those looks of yours hurt me more than a thousand actual verbal insults would!

Painful! This is just too painful! It’s like I am forced to relive the trauma of my chuunibyou years all over again! N-No, be silent, oh the forbidden power that dwelleth inside of my left hand! Even though you feel anger at those insignificant peasants making fun of your host, you mustn’t unleash thine wrath upon this unworthy plain of existence if the equilibrium is to stay unharmed…… FUCK! I did it again! My dark history! The shameful past I was trying so hard to put behind me! It’s all coming back to me!

“Well? How is it, Michio-sama? Can you do it?”

“I would if I could, but unfortunately it looks like my inventory space is completely filled up.”

That was obviously a lie, but at the current moment I couldn’t come up with anything better, to explain what happened to my Durandal, so I just have to hope that it’s going to sound believable enough for them to lay off of me. And while we’re at it, where did that goddamn sword go anyway?!

“Oh, then that is truly unfortunate. Tell me, Michio-sama, have you ever been to the city of Veil?”

“Hm? No, can’t say that I did.”

“Actually, I will be heading there tomorrow at dawn to do my merchant business. If it’s alright with you, I could carry all of your equipment there on my wagon. The city of Veil has many shops that specialize in weapons and armor for Adventurers so it could be easily sold there without any problems.”

The merchant offers. To be honest I was expecting him to buy all that crap off of me right away, but it looks like things won’t be that simple. Nevertheless, if he’s so graciously offering to do this for me then I should probably take him up on his kind offer.

“Thank you very much. If you could do that for me, I would be much obliged.”

It’s a good thing that you don’t have to use any complicated menus to hand your possessions over to other people.

“Marvelous. With that said, here is your Intelligence Card from the Bandits.”

The merchant presented me with a notepad sized card.

“Intelligence… Card?”

I ask back at him, unsure of that that thing actually was.

“It is a proof that you have defeated all those Bandits that dropped out of the body of their leader after the fight. With a group as large as they were, some of them are surely bound to be notorious wanted criminals, so if you present it at the headquarters of the Knights of Vale Order, I’m sure you’ll be eligible to a handsome reward.”

“Is that… so?”

At first that Intelligence Card term sounded like more trouble than it was worth, but now that the merchant guy explained it to me in detail, the whole matter became quite easy to understand. This is a world with a medieval setting where bandit attacks are commonplace, so it would stand to reason that some of them gathered quite a lot of infamy to their name, resulting in sending wanted posters with their faces all over the kingdom. So this little card is the proof that the deed has been done that everybody seems to be aware of, huh? And I might get some dough out of it? Well, count me in!

Of course, after being killed, the same Bandits won't come back to life again, right? Right, of course. If this is the real world, then it must be like that. Only one life per person, no redos or respawns allowed.

Even though I more or less understood the principles behind the Intelligence Cards and how they worked, it was still a hefty amount of information dumped upon me all at once, so I couldn't help it but to feel a little bit overwhelmed. I examined the Card one more time just to be sure that I didn't miss anything important and then I proceeded with the inspection of my share of the Bandit's equipment.

Most of it consisted of Copper and Bronze Swords, but my eyes were immediately drawn towards an Iron Sword. It looked to be at least one rank above the rest of the common trash, making it a rare weapon. Well shit. I actually don't want it to be rare. The rarer the item, the bigger the chance that someone is going to target me to steal it.

Looking at all the swords with Identify, there was one thing that caught me as strange.

One of the better looking Bronze Swords had an empty window. The rest of the Copper Swords didn't have any windows at all.

"Is everything all right, Michio-sama? Has something caught your attention?"

The merchant asked me as I was examining the Bronze Sword in my hand. Durandal also had windows like that, but they were filled with various skills. So could it be that this empty window is actually a skill slot?

"This seems to be a good weapon, better than the rest of similar ones."

"Oh, so you were able to figure that out? For someone who is not a Merchant, you seem to have quite a good eye."

However, there is a small problem. I don't know how to acquire and equip skills.

"Skill. Skill Slot. Grant Skill. Assign Skill."

I mumbled to myself again and again nothing happened and nothing changed, as expected. Ah well, not like I hoped for it to go any different than all those other times when I tried to use spoken commands only to end up severely disappointed. For now I should just finish appraising and maybe consider another character reset to see if

anything can actually be done about that.

“If you are wondering about the skill slots, then allow me to explain. They can be created by the blacksmiths when they fuse them from the corresponding Skill Crystals. Does the sword you’re holding have any skills assigned to it?”

“No, I don’t see anything like that. The slot is empty.”

“That is unfortunate, but nothing to fret about.”

So it looks like I’m going to need those Skill Crystals in order to add skills to the weapons and I will only be able to do so at a blacksmith, or perhaps I’ll be able to do it myself if I obtain the Blacksmith Job.

“All in all, this isn’t a bad sword, so I think I might do just that.”

“Michio-sama, are you able to tell if a weapon has a skill attached to it or not?”

The Village Chief inquired.

“Generally, yeah. I think you may call it, “An Adventurer’s Intuition”.

Since Identify id a Bonus Skill, very few people should possess it, so I think it would be wise of me not to mention that I have an ability like that.

“If that is the case, then can I trouble you with looking at the rest of them with your discerning eyes? It would make our lives that much easier if we could pick the best ones possible for the purpose of defending ourselves and selling the ones that we won’t need.”

“I guess I can do that, but don’t blame me if there’ll be something that I won’t be able to understand.”

“You have my eternal gratitude, Michio-sama. Well then, let’s get to it right away.”

And I followed after the Village Chief to inspect the rest of the weaponry. Looking through all of them took me some time, but when I was finally done I could tell with absolute certainty that no other weapon aside from the ones that were assigned to me had any skills or skill slots on them. It was the same for all the armor and a bandana that were found among the things Bandits dropped when they died.

Huh? A bandana? Was that the one worn by the Bandit Leader? I must've missed it in the heat of battle.

…Or maybe not. Thinking about it now, it doesn't have to be a part of Bandit Leader's equipment at all!

Just now, all the finer details began coming back to me. Such a Bandana was not worn by the Bandit Leader, but by some of the common ones which were named Bandana Bandits. Just a common piece of cloth worn by the most common of small fries. It totally makes sense. If a Bandit wears a Bandana, he Becomes a Bandana Bandit, otherwise he would be a simple Bandit with no distinguishing features whatsoever. See? Completely logical… not!

This is a world of a game, so there must be some kinda hidden gimmick to it. So, my dear, Bandana, what are you, exactly?

"What is this Bandana right here?"

"I think it is the common one worn by Bandits."

But contrary to my expectations, the merchant didn't impart any useful knowledge to me.

"Huh? What is it doing here. If memory serves me correctly, none of the Bandits wore something like that."

The Village Chief said something truly outrageous. None of them wore it?! But… but that would mean that my own memory lied to me… or did it, really? Maybe there really weren't any Bandana Bandits in the group that attacked the village and it was just a trick of my mind which was quite high on adrenaline at the moment it all transpired? But that would mean that someone has deliberately placed it here. Or that it was simply a rare drop and I was just lucky enough to get it during the very first tutorial battle.

It's funny, isn't it?

Back when I was still living in Japan (it feels weird to phrase it like that when you consider the fact that I left it literally a few hours ago, but whatever). Throughout my old life I was mostly a loser who used to cry himself to sleep every night, I didn't like to stand out and get into fights. But this world is not modern Japan. In this world, if

you underestimate even the smallest of threats, you might pay for it with your life. I am the perfect example of that. I don't know how I came here but I did, and using my cheat-like weapon I have ended the lives of many people who probably didn't expect they'd die today, thus saving the village and its inhabitants from what would probably be a morbid end (even though saving the village wasn't my intention in the slightest, but telling them that would be too much of an arrow to my own knee, so I'm just not going to do that.)

Anyway, I think I'm getting off topic too much, so let me get back to it before things get any weirder than they already are.

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Village Chief looks intently at the Bandana and his brows frown as if he was trying to remember something with all his mental capability.

"I might be wrong… but I think that was indeed what the leader of the Bandits was wearing."

"Oh, really now?"

The merchant's face got distorted with surprise.

"X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X?"

"X X X X X, X X X X X X X X X X!"

Judging by his innocent reaction just now, it couldn't have been the merchant. Either that, or he is a very good actor who has no trouble with masking his real emotions, which I highly doubt. Same goes for the Village Chief. He wouldn't have made that remark if he was the one who replaced the item.

"That's impossible. Allow me to check right away!"

He shouts and then quickly leaves.

I wonder what will happen now? Can the (supposedly) stolen equipment really be found that easily? Also, currently I am only a Lv2 Villager, so if at all possible, I would like to avoid being in the center of everyone's attention as much as possible. If by any

chance this develops into a more serious situation involving the entire village, it might be possible for them to find out that I have actually stolen the sandals I am wearing right now and automatically connect the Bandana switching with me. If the whole village attacked me at once for that, there's no way I'd be able to win against all of them.

Maybe I shouldn't have mentioned it after all? Was I too hasty with that?

With that said, even if I did steal those sandals, the best course of action for now would be to keep quiet and see how the situation is going to develop.

At the very least, maybe I should have my Durandal ready?

As I stood there, contemplating what I should do now, a woman carrying three swords appeared. Could those belong to former adventurers?

"Want me to appraise those as well?"

I ask the merchant.

"If you would be so kind."

"Okay, let's see what we're dealing with here."

"X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X."

"X X X X X."

Urged by the merchant's unintelligible words, the woman presented me with the swords. According to the Identify window, her name was Tirihi, 31 years old. Perhaps she was a widow after some Adventurer?

She was fairly well built and had long, braided blonde hair, typical for the women hailing from the countryside of eastern Europe. From the perspective of someone like me, a high schooler who didn't even hit adulthood yet, she was old enough to be considered an auntie, in the positive meaning of the word. To be honest, the more I actually looked at her, the more certain parts of me became twitchy & itchy. Normally widows and married women are not in my strike zone, but I felt like I could make an exception just for her. After all, I am the hero who saved this village, so maybe with a little help from gentle persuasion she'd be willing to keep me company for tonight…

yeah, right, as if that would happen.

Let's behave ourselves for the time being and shake off any inappropriate thoughts. I hold the sword in my hands and look at it inquisitively. The weapon I am holding now is a one handed sword called Flame Rapier. From the looks and the description of its skill, it is a thrusting weapon which deals fire damage instead of regular physical damage.

"This is a pretty good sword."

"X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X."

"Mrs. Tirihi says she is grateful for your humble words, Michio-sama."

Next I grasped the sword firmly with both my hands and swung it a few times while exclaiming:

"Fire Sword!"

Nothing happened, nothing changed. The rapier's blade wasn't coated with fire or anything. It remained all the same no matter how many times I repeated my swinging motion. *Sigh* Am I actually insane? 'Cause I already know it's not going to work and yet here I am, trying the same thing again. If that isn't madness then I don't know what is.

"……"

"……"

Tirihi-san and the merchant are looking at me with those suspicious eyes again.

There it is, another broken death flag!

But just as I was about to fall into depression, a mysterious spell formula appeared in my head. Should I recite it? Something was telling that doing so will actually activate the skill laying dormant within the weapon, so I think it is at least worth a try. Well, here goes.

"Answer the burning will of my heart and manifest thyself! Flame Sword!"

I shouted the spell and swung the rapier from above my head. After a brief, 0.5 seconds delay a trail of fire followed the trajectory of the slash I have performed.

Oh wow. This. Is. Awesome!

“Haaa…!”

Tirihi-san also looked quite surprised at that sudden spectacle. Uh, lady, why are you so surprised? This is your late husband’s sword, right? Have you never seen him doing something like that… no. If she knew the sword could do something like that, then she wouldn’t bother with bringing it to me to appraise it.

Then the Village Chief appeared at the edge of my field of vision, talking to the other villagers, who probably saw me using that skill just now, because they were pointing their fingers at me and talking rather excitedly, which sends my mind into an alarmed state, so I tried to observe them without making it too obvious that I’m staring at them. What if they found out about my crime of sandal theft?! What happens to a thief once he’s caught? Am I going to be made an example of and be flogged in front of the entire village? Or have my hand cut off?! Or perhaps they’ll throw me into a tar-filled kettle and feather me to simultaneously punish me and make me into a laughingstock? That would certainly be a good demonstration of what happens to those who dare to break the law, haha, hahahahahaha.

No Michio, you mustn’t think like that all the time! I know that my outcast mentality is probably at fault here, but can you really blame me for constantly doubting anyone and everyone around me? All my life I’ve been shown time and time again that others only want to hurt me, that’s why I began to distance myself from them in the first place. But this strange new world is not, at least in theory, like the modern day Japan I chose to leave behind. No one knows me here, so you shouldn’t assume that they’ll treat you like a dirtbag as well. It might be difficult… heck, it certainly will be difficult, but maybe I should try to have a little more faith in people. Besides, even if I did steal those sandals from that barn, there’s no concrete evidence pointing to me being the culprit, and they certainly weren’t labeled with anybody’s name, so even if I show them to the entire village I should still be in the clear.

“X X X X X X X X X X X! X X X, X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X!”

“X X X X. X X X, X X X X X X X X X.”

Next to me, Merchant and Tirihi-san also discussed something that I was still unable to understand. The only thing that I was absolutely sure of, was the fact that after using that skill my body suddenly became quite weary and heavy. Even so, the fatigue I felt right now was not a physical, but rather a mental one which made me feel extremely tired, losing the will to do anything that required any kind of effort on my part. As a result, the rapier in my hands was getting heavier and heavier with each consecutive attempt at swinging it. Going by the standards of the classical RPG games, skills must have some kinda cost to using them, like MP or something along those lines and I probably expended too much of it. But I guess that was to be expected. After all, I currently have only Lv2 at the most basic of the basic Jobs, so it would stand to reason that my ability to use skills and spells would be greatly hindered by having abysmally low stats. And while we are on the topic of stats, I used Identify on myself to check my status and sure enough, right under the red HP bar and above the green Stamina bar was a blue bar labeled MP, which was depleted by approximately 75%. Ouch. As I thought. Until I gained some more levels, no skill spamming for me I guess.

"So, what would you like to do with that weapon, Michio-sama?"

"Meaning?"

"For what price would you like to sell it?"

The merchant asks. Oh, that's right. Since I'm the one appraising it, I guess it falls to me to decide what to do with it?

To sell or not to sell, that is the question. What should I do? Decisions, decisions, decisions.

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"I… I don't know, really. I am not well versed in how the market works, so I don't know what the best decision would be here. Heck, I don't even know this sword's usual market price."

"So you have no intention of selling it then?"

"As I told you, I don't know the exact market price so I can't make such a decision carelessly. I think the best thing we could do right now is to go to the Weapon Shop in the city and ask someone there to tell us the actual price of this thing, otherwise we

might just end up throwing a valuable item away at a dirt-cheap price."

Not to mention that I don't even know what kind of currency they are using here.

"X X X X X? X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X?"

"X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X."

Teirihi-san and the merchant have a short conversation again after which she bows her head to me. Wouldn't it be nice if that was the sign of her readiness to service me tonight? Man, that would be totally awesome! Unfortunately that kind of thing is probably not going to happen. But it's nice to keep dreaming, right?

I handed the rapier over to Teirihi-san and took another sword from her, which turned out to be a one-handed Scimitar with two empty skill slots. All in all, it looked like another solid weapon.

"This one doesn't have any skills but seems like a fine piece of work overall."

"Supposedly it was very cherished by its previous owner, an Adventurer who sadly perished in the heat of battle."

This time he didn't ask me how I knew it had two skill slots free, meaning he must've bought my story about it being an Adventurer's intuition.

"It think it will also be good to show this to someone who's in the know before we decide what to do with it."

I handed the Scimitar over to Teirihi-san and she bows her head down to me again. The last item was a simple dagger without any decorations whatsoever. It doesn't look like something that would sell for much money.

"This is just a plain dagger. Not bad as a weapon but there's no way it can be sold for any significant amount."

Well buddy, back to Teirihi-san you go.

"X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X."

When the merchant relayed what I just said to her, her eyes instantly turned red and

wet with tears. Uh-oh, I might have made a huge oopsie. Nevertheless, she endured the urge to cry and went back home with the weapon in tow. Perhaps she remembered her late husband and wanted to be alone for a while. That was a shattered flag if I ever saw one. Nevertheless, I will be waiting for you tonight, Teirihi-san. My doors will always be open for you.

Now that Teirihi-san went away, the Village Chief approached us together with several other men.

“My humblest apologies, Michio-sama, but this man right here was the one responsible for replacing the Bandana.”

The man who was being dragged along behind him had his hands cuffed in a set of wooden handcuffs. *Sarcastically* So he’s the one who tried to take that which did not belong to him without permission. Deplorable, truly deplorable. I renounce that man the most scornfully!

“This is the correct item he was trying to hide.”

The Village Chief urged another man to come forward and hand me the Bandana. I used Identify on it to confirm its authenticity.

Bandit’s Bandana. No skill slots or skills.

“This is the item in question indeed. There is no doubt.”

“Now, as for the punishment this man is going to be subjected to…”

The Chief says after we finished the Bandit’s Bandana inspection. I wanted to ask about that, but he beat me to the punch. How thoughtful of him. This was something that I was very eager to hear. I have to know if the criminals are handed over to some higher authorities or will the villagers take care of him themselves.

“For the crime he has committed against you, he’s going to be tried and judged in accordance with the village’s rules. Do you have any objections to that decision?”

This is going to be perfect. As a man who’s skilled at reading the mood, there is only one thing for me to say in this situation.

“Of course. Do what you think is best.”

“Of course. We will do just that.”

Huh? What’s that? Was that a glimpse of disappointment I saw in the Chief’s eyes? Did I say something wrong?

“X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X.”

“X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X.”

The Chief spoke to the criminal.

The criminal nods and holds his bound hands in front of me.

“Flow of the Water Spirit, breath of the Wind Spirit, unite and reveal the hidden truth. Intelligence Card, open.”

When the Chief finished the chant, a card popped out of the criminal’s left hand.

Oooooh! What was that! That was so cool! It’s just like the Intelligence Cards that were left by the Bandits that were given to me. The Village Chief took it and murmured something I wasn’t quite able to hear, and the additional information appeared on the Card.

“What did you do?”

“I added new information to this man’s Intelligence Card. The information that from this day forward he will be your slave and he shall remain a slave unless he is released from his slave duty or bought back.”

“Ah, okay, cool I get it.”

I don’t get it at all. What exactly did you do and how does that even work?!

For the time being, what I do get is that Intelligence Cards are items that contain every important information about a person, that’s why it can serve to identify the Bandits who were slain by me so that I could claim the reward for them.

“Allow me to explain further. The rules of our village state that if the villagers commit a crime such as stealing they are to be sold as a slave where half of the money obtained that way goes to the family who sold the criminal and the other half is given to the

victim as compensation… Of course, it will be the same in your case."

So they have a slave system established here. Not good.

The situation was now clear to me. If they ever find out about my crime, I will end up just like that guy in the wooden handcuffs. Mu freedom would be taken from me and that's something I absolutely cannot allow!

"I'll gladly take you up on that offer, but I'll have you know that I don't hold it against him for what he did. No hard feelings."

"That might be true, but it doesn't change the fact that one of our own has wronged you."

"What matters most is that the person responsible was caught. You don't have to apologize for anything, Chief."

"You're too kind to me, Michio-sama. It's good to know that there are still people like you in the world."

"Thank you very much. I think we can now conclude the weapon inspection."

"Then let us go back to my house. The breakfast should be ready now."

"Thank you for having me."

I was grateful that we could change the subject to something more pleasant.

I have made up my mind.

I'm getting the fuck out of this place as soon as possible.

CHAPTER 2
VEIL

1

Player Name: Kaga Michio

Character Information & Equipment:

Class: Villager Lv2, Hero Lv1, Thief Lv2

Accessory: Ring of Determination, Sandals

“Michio-sama, you’re more than welcome to stay here for tonight if you want. We’ll prepare the best feast possible to show you our gratitude.”

The Village Chief told me that while we were eating breakfast, which consisted of oatmeal with salad and cheese. I can’t say it was the best I have ever had, but all in all it wasn’t that bad either. If we assume that this is the absolute bottom tier when it comes to food quality and that it can only go up more civilized cities, then I think I won’t have any problems adapting to living in this world, at least as long as the food is concerned.

From what the Chief said I think it is safe to assume that dinner is going to be on the more luxurious side, fitting for a hero who saved the village from the Bandit attack. Nothing was said about lunch. It is possible that I am biased based on my current lifestyle where I always had three meals a day, but it looks like in this world the standard is two meals a day: breakfast and dinner.

“Thank you very much. Allow me to take you up on your kind offer.”

“Also, about your plans for tomorrow, the merchant said that his carriage is going to be departing for the city of Veil early in the morning. If you plan on going with him, then I suggest you to go to sleep early tonight.”

“Exactly how long will the journey to Veil take?”

“About three hours by carriage.”

The biggest question now is whether or not three hours here are the same as the three hours back in my old world. If I assume that they are, then I can do the following calculation: if we were to depart for Veil at around 8:00 AM then we would arrive at our destination at around 11:00 AM. If the merchant wants to wrap everything up in a day trip, he would have to leave the city by 3:00 PM to return to the village by 6:00 PM, meaning that the total time he would be spending in the city would be around four hours. He said he was going to restock on food and basic supplies, so I think that shouldn’t take him very long to finish? ’Cause if we were able to return here before it gets dark, then maybe I’ll have some free time to go fishing.

“Then I shall do just like you suggest.”

“Wonderful. I will be sure to relay the message to the merchant.”

With that settled, what should I do until tomorrow? Just sitting idly by would most definitely be counterproductive, so it would be nice if I could maybe find myself a spot to hunt some mobs in order to increase my level as much as possible.

“If I may ask, are there any mobs around this village?”

“Mobs? Could you perhaps be talking about monsters?”

“Ahh, yeah. That’s right. Monsters. Are there any monsters around here?”

Note to self: Monsters, not Mobs. Gotta keep my player habits in check if I want to avoid making everybody needlessly suspicious of me.

“Well, I guess there are Slow Rabbits in the depths of the forest not far from here.”

“Slow Rabbits? I’ve never fought them before.”

The name suggested that they are weak as shit, but my gut was telling me that I shouldn’t be overly confident just yet. Maybe it’s one of those cases where the name is deceitful, masking the monster’s true strength?

All right now, Village Chief. Time to make you spill some more beans for me!

“What kind of a monster are they, exactly? Those Slow Rabbits, I mean.”

“Oh, they are relatively harmless because they tend to distance themselves from any human settlements and even in direct combat they are not much of a threat.”

“Oh, is that so? Good to know.”

Lucky me! Looks like I’ll be able to grind with relative ease if they really are so weak. They will serve as a good way to pass the time and who knows, maybe I’ll also be able to farm some items that I’ll be able to sell for a nice prize?

Yes, that should be my current mindset. No use worrying that I might not be able to go back to Japan for now. Instead, I should focus all of my energy into securing a relatively stable situation for myself and I’ll definitely need a clear head on my shoulders for that.

“As expected of an Adventurer! Even though they are hardly worth the effort, you’ll still get out of your way to hunt them to keep the village safe from their menace!”

Dude… I think you’re reading too much into it. Also, why have you reacted by shouting like that?

“If they are as weak as you describe them to be, then is it really a reason to be getting so emotional over them?”

“Y-Yes, of course they are.”

“Uh-huh, okay, keep going…”

“Even the Villagers can defeat one if they assault it in a group.”

Hey. What was that? It took several of you to defeat just one Rabbit?! How is that… no, Michio, keep your cool about you. Remember, gather information first, be a judgemental prick later.

“What about the drops? Did it left anything behind when you killed it?”

“Well we did managed to salvage the Rabbit’s Fur out of it.”

“I see.”

Does that mean its fur is a drop item or something they salvaged manually by skinning it? It would be nice if it was the former.

“What is it, Michio-sama? Is there any problem with hunting those monsters?”

My doubts must have shown on my face, because the Chief asked me in a worried tone.

“No, everything’s fine.”

Although I really wished it wasn’t.

That was another dilemma for me. Should I really go for it? Will I, a low-level character be able to defeat monsters that higher level villagers had to gang up on to defeat just a single one? Then again, if I really want to live in this world as its full-fledged denizen, I’ll have to eventually venture into the wild and start hunting monsters myself. I have no guarantee that this Slow Rabbit is really easy to defeat, but if I decide to do it after all then the sooner I take care of it the better.

I have no idea if I can even go back to the Japan I know and even if I could, I don’t know if I want to go back to the shitty life I had there. And, objectively speaking, how much worse can this world be compared to my own. The risk of imminent death? Sure it’s unpleasant, but everyone will die eventually. Ironically, I’ve found my way into this world thanks to a suicide website. I wanted to end my own life, so what difference does it make if I do it myself or with the assistance of some random monster? I have literally nothing to lose, so I might as well go check those Slow Rabbits out.

“All right, I think I will go check out those monsters now. It won’t be a problem as long as I return here in time for dinner, right?”

As long as I use my Durandal, things shouldn’t go south too quickly, and if they do, I can always tuck my tail between my legs and run. I stood up from my chair and started heading towards the door, when the Chief called out to me again.

“Michio-sama. Actually, some of our village youths want to hunt the Slow Rabbits as well. If at all possible, would it be all right for them to join you in your venture to the woods?”

“You mean go for a hunt together with them?”

“If they go with you, I have no doubt that they are going to have a good experience.”

Damn, what do I do now?

It would definitely be safer if I had more people with me. But…

“With all due respect, but I think it would be better if I went alone. I have never fought a Slow Rabbit before, so if worse came to worst I don’t know if I’d be able to keep all the other’s out of harm’s way.”

“Now that I think about it, you’re right. How wise of you to think about our youths well-being, Michio-sama!”

There was that, but I also had another reason for turning his request down.

At my current level I am weak, even if one of my weapons is OP as heck, so if one of the guys who went with me died a gruesome death it would be possible that the family or close friends of the deceased would want me to take responsibility for that, and since this village has adopted a slavery system, I concluded it is in my best interest to avoid such situations at all costs. I’m not risking any chances of becoming a slave because of somebody else’s stupidity, oh hell no!

2

After finishing my meal I put back the Bandits’ Intelligence Cards, equip the Copper Sword and slowly make my way into the woods near the village. Strangely enough, not a single monster appeared even after I’ve been heading straight ahead for about 10 minutes. Normally when it comes to games, I’d have been attacked as soon as taking less than 10 paces outside the village, which should be considered as a safe zone for the players (in this particular case, myself), but no, there wasn’t even one random encounter yet. I was honestly kinda disappointed, but at the same time some part of me felt relieved that I didn’t have to fight anything yet. Oh, while we’re at it, I also wondered why would anyone build a village in a spot full of monsters that were too tough for ordinary people to defeat by themselves? Seems needlessly hazardous and counterproductive to me. Also, since I am finally alone with myself, there’s something I want to try.

“Intelligence Card, open!”

You know what happened? Yah, that’s right, you guessed it: big fat nothing happened. But it’s okay, this time I knew it would happen because the spell was not the same as

when the Village Chief did it and I am not the kind of person who would memorize an entire spell after only listening to it once. So now I know that even for my own Intelligence Card this funky incantation is a must. And since I have firmly established that now, I can proceed forward without worrying about it too much.

Not long after I reached the thicker part of the woods I finally stumbled upon some strange animal, covered with white fur, about 50 cm long in total. Could this be the Slow Rabbit? I focused my gaze on it and used Identify and this is what came up:

“Slow Rabbit, Lv1”

Okay, so Identify works on other things than myself and the NPC’s without any problems. Thankfully this guy is just Lv1. But then, why would the villagers have difficulties fighting something that has to basically be this world’s equivalent of a Slime from other RPG’s, meaning the weakest monster possible? I better remain cautious not to have my ass handed to me on a silver platter. I mean how big of a laughingstock would I be if something like that defeated me after I slew so many higher-leveled Bandits essentially by myself? I don’t know how big of a wallop this guy actually packs, so I think it would be better for me to use Durandal here instead of a simple Copper Sword.

I opened up my Status screen and went through another Character Reset, switching back to my original settings where I had 64 Bonus Points to use by returning to the 1/5 EXP Required and Obtained EXP x5 and putting them all into Bonus Weapon 6 and since that upgrade cost 63 Bonus Points total, I had 1 Point remaining. Now what should I use it for?

Maybe… Meteor Crash? The description says that it is a very powerful offensive magic, so having it around might prove useful if I ever find myself to be in a tight spot. I confirmed the selection of Meteor Crash and ended the Character Reset there. Durandal appeared in my left hand on its own.

Initially I thought that if I used magic I wouldn’t have to resort to using Durandal, but just in case I won’t be able to finish that monster off with a single blow it will be my backup plan. I placed it at my waist, but moving around with two swords equipped on me proved to be more than a little difficult, probably because I was not used to it, so I decided to just leave the Copper Sword leaning against a nearby tree. Now I unsheathed Durandal and grabbed it firmly with both my hands.

Looks like the Slow Rabbit hasn't noticed me yet. This might be my chance to one shot it with a surprise attack! Here it goes!

"Meteor Crash!"

I yelled that out loud at the top of my lungs.

But nothing happened. And nothing changed. I just stood there, staring at the rabbit like an idiot while he also looked at me with a question mark above its head. Really now, all that I need now to complete this scene are the cricket noises and some tumbleweed rolling in the background. Thank God we are so deep in the forest where no one could witness that epic fail of mine!

The spell! I didn't chant the spell's formula, that's probably why it didn't work!

As soon as I thought about that, the chant for Meteor Crash appeared in my mind. Okay, all right, sounds easy enough. Let's try using it now, hopefully to good effect.

"From beyond the infinite universe, the will of the sky is to diminish, destroy! METEOR CRASH!!!!"

I thought I nailed the incantation on the head this time, but once again nothing happened. But I finally noticed why. I didn't have enough MP to cast the spell. Strange. I have eaten more than enough and I am definitely not tired. Moreover, my MP that I lost after using the Fire Rapier should have also been replenished already. But if the spell refused to activate even after all of that, then there is only one possible explanation for this: the Villager's Job MP total at Lv2 was simply too low to use a spell such as Meteor Crash.

All this time, the Slow Rabbit just stood there and did nothing, looking at me as if I was some kinda exotic peculiarity. Oi, if you really are a monster, shouldn't you be running away from humans as soon as you see one?! Or maybe it wasn't afraid because it was actually so strong that it thought a single person wasn't enough to even scratch it after it learned that the villagers needed to hunt them down in groups? Well, guess what, buddy, here's some Holy Sword for you to taste! Let's see how tough you will be after I give you a good old stabby-stab where the sun doesn't shine!

With that I rushed at the monster and slashed it diagonally from top down. The sword digs into the rabbit's flesh as if it was cutting through butter, shredding him almost in half without any difficulties. The Slow Rabbit, a monstrosity that required a group of

villagers to defeat just a single one, fell to the ground, lifeless. All it took was literally one blow and it was over. After a few seconds its body began to emit puffs of green smoke before it melted away into nothingness. All that was left of it after the smoke cleared was a tuft of white, soft fur. Upon closer examination, it was the supposed drop item, The Rabbit's Fur. So that's what Chief was talking about when he was saying that they were able to salvage the fur out of the one rabbit they managed to slay. I took the fur and placed it in my inventory and returned to the place where I have left the Copper Sword. Using Durandal honestly felt like too much of an overkill for the opponents of such a low caliber, but there was always a possibility that I can bump into much stronger monsters while casually strolling through the woods or that only this particular Slow Rabbit happened to be weak as shit. With that thought in mind, I decided to explore the depths of the forest for a little while longer.

Not long after that first encounter I happened upon two more Slow Rabbits, but they were much the same as the first one: one-shotted with Durandal's single slash, so yeah, using the Holy Sword to fight them definitely felt like I was cheating, but on the other hand I now had 3 pieces of Rabbit's Fur instead of one, so I guess I wasn't really in the position to complain or anything. But when the next battle comes around, maybe I will try using the Copper Sword instead of Durandal, just to give those poor mobs an actual fighting chance, or maybe reset my character entirely again…

Huh? What's this?

I should have no Bonus Points remaining, but for some reason my status screen says that I have 1 more point to use. Could it be that you automatically get Bonus Points over time? That's pretty neat. Okay, but for now I will discard Bonus Weapon 6 and put my Bonus Points between 1/20 EXP Required and Obtained EXP x10. The Bonus Points are now 0. With Meteor Crash still marked as checked, it is much better usage of the points than before. With my preparations finished, it's time to go look for another Slow Rabbit to check how the current settings I am rocking will fare in actual combat.

The Copper Sword's performance was obviously not as good as Durandal's, but all things considered it wasn't that bad either. At least I didn't one-shot the like before, but it didn't change the fact that even such a basic sword tore through their flesh without any major difficulties, maybe not cleaving them cleanly in half but digging pretty deeply into them.

But I have to tell you, the Slow Rabbit I'm fighting now is pretty tanky. It withstood not

only my first attack, but also a second slash that came right after the first one, and it even managed to strike me with a counterattack. Or it would have if I didn't manage to avoid it in the nick of time. We exchanged two blows. This time its hits connected, but the resulting damage wasn't all that impressive. Nevertheless, I have to remain cautious at all times. Even the most insignificant of hits can turn lethal if they'd be allowed to pile up. The one saving grace here was that my enemy wasn't able to move very fast. It was a rabbit, after all. But just when I thought that, it did something totally unexpected which caught me totally off guard.

It jumped towards my throat with its bared teeth!

3

Just what is this thing, a friggin' Caerbannog Rabbit?! Its head is badly damaged, as is the rest of its body but despite that it was still able to move around to such a degree!

I instinctively backstepped to prevent it from biting into my throat but that didn't stop it from pressing on the attack. It even threw an occasional body slam into the mix! And let me tell you, when it connected, I felt that with my whole body as a numbing shock spread throughout it! This is really dangerous. I cannot allow any more of those to hit me or I might be toast for sure!

I hacked and slashed at the damn thing but it was as if it had engaged some kinda "Zombie-Berserk Mode" or something, because no matter how many times I managed to cut it, it just refused to drop dead and die. Damn it, why are my attacks not working as well as they were just a few minutes ago?! Whenever I could I sneaked two or three strikes in, but it just completely abandoned any form of defense in favor of an aggressive offense. This is getting worse by the minute! If I don't do anything, I might die to this rabbit for real!

I somehow managed to avoid its subsequent attacks and regain my proper fighting posture and even hit the Slow Rabbit in the belly, making blood gush out of it. Good, it looks like that slash was deep enough to actually do something to it. If I can just keep this up, then I might be able to finally bring this bastard down!

But despite my best attempts, it still refuses to drop dead.

Another blow. And another one. Another one, another one, another one. At long last, after what seemed to be an eternity for me, the Slow Rabbit finally bites the dust and

melts into the ground after emitting a puff of smoke.

“Haaa…”

I made a big sigh as my shoulders were frantically moving up and down in tandem with my ragged breath and the aching which was resonating throughout my whole body. That… was… beyond… ridiculous now! Is the difference between a normal weapon and the one obtained through Bonus Weapon really that big? I mean seriously, compared to Durandal, the Copper Sword was like, thousand times weaker, maybe even more! Or could it be that this particular Slow Rabbit was bugged beyond all rationality with how insanely strong and tough to take down he was?!

Speaking of which, he should have had a Lv displayed next to his name? I know it was thoughtless of me not to confirm it when the battle started, but I just kinda sorta assumed that it’s going to be Lv1, the same as all the others. But now I know what to look out for, so from now on, I will be using Durandal to fight with every enemy that might show up to make sure that a fuckup such as this one won’t happen again. I now see that the copper Sword is, without the shade of a doubt, the shittiest of the shitty weapons in this world. As for Durandal, did it not have some kinda life steal or absorption skill? I’m sure that with it I will be healing my wounds faster than the enemies will be able to inflict them upon me, limiting the damage taken to the bare minimum or maybe even eliminate it altogether. With that in mind I put away the Copper Sword and all the Rabbit’s Fur I managed to collect and equipped Durandal again.

Not long after that encounter I happened upon another Slow Rabbit, but this time I made sure to check it out with Identify. So those things are Lv1 after all? I approached it while remaining cautious and prepared my Holy Sword, slashing at it while it was unaware of my presence. It disappeared in a puff of smoke while leaving the Rabbit’s Fur behind while relieving some of my body’s pain and recovering a bit of HP. It’s great that this is an actual recovery, not a placebo effect. That way I should return to my best condition after defeating just one or two more enemies. I bagged another copy of Rabbit’s Fur to my Item Box and continued to look for more prey.

There weren’t that many monsters left in this neck of the woods anymore, but I continued my search in hope of finding even a single one, but I guess that has its merits too. With no monsters in the immediate vicinity of the village I will be able to live that much more calmly, at least until I will finally decide to leave this place for good.

I wandered around the forest until it was late afternoon and I killed around 10 more Slow Rabbits. It's not getting dark just yet, but it will soon be 10:00 PM and the last thing I want to do is to wander around in the forest I have no knowledge of when it is getting so late so I should probably make my way back as soon as possible.

Even though I could probably still fight some more, that was definitely enough harvesting for today. I slowly exhaled, looked at my own opened hand and used Identify to check my Status.

Player Name: Kaga Michio

Character Information & Equipment:

Class: Villager Lv3, Hero Lv1, Thief Lv3

Weapon: Holy Sword Durandal

Accessory: Ring of Determination, Sandals

Looks like my levels are slowly rising and the best way to keep it that way is to continue to seek and kill monsters. It might also be connected to the fact that earlier my Bonus Points went up for some reason. That reason might be one of the Jobs leveling up to Lv2. So does that mean I scored some good EXP for those Bandits who attacked the village? I must've gotten so much that I didn't notice gaining a Lv2 in my Jobs since that would explain why reaching Lv3 took me almost an entire day of farming basic mobs. But if the leveling process is so easy, then why are most of the villagers such low-levels? Could the speed of gaining EXP have something to do with this? Questions for later. For now, it would be nice to receive confirmation regarding Bonus Points. Are they really increasing with each Level Up? And how do I use them without resetting my character all the time? If I want to be able to pull my own weight in here I better find the answer to those questions fast. See, this is by far the biggest problem I have with this shitty game: it doesn't give you any Tutorials on how to do things, it's just "Hey dog, you've been thrown into the game and like, that's it man, go figure the rest out for yourself because we're too lazy to explain even the most basic of mechanics.". Oh come on, even Dark Souls did it better!

For now I unequipped Durandal and headed back in the direction of the village. On my way back I was thinking of resetting my character again and trying the other options

from different levels of the Bonus Weapon skill, which were 5 in total, but then a thought occurred to me: those different Bonus Weapons will probably be weaker than the Holy Sword Durandal, a weapon from Bonus Weapon 6, which was capable of decimating enemies with a single blow, not to mention that it's HP Absorption power was necessary for me to recover my health effectively. So maybe I should keep Durandal instead of experimenting with different ones after all? Also, the Rabbit's Fur is quite small and light, so I wonder how many of those would I need to gather in order to make a coat out of it? Something is telling that it would have to be around 100 or 200 of them, maybe even more. Not to mention that the selling price probably won't be that high. All right, Durandal it is. I don't care if using it against Lv1 monsters is going to be considered a cheat or not. All that matters is my own survival and the comfort and ease of the hunt.

While finally making up my mind I have reached the back of the village.

Next to the Village Chief's house was another one almost as big that had its doors widely opened. A three-story house that the merchant came out of in the morning. I wonder if this is his shop, his personal house, or maybe two of them combined into one? I took a peek inside and surely enough, he was right there behind the counter.

"Welcome!"

There weren't any shelves with products of any sort, but it was obviously a store of some kind.

"Sorry for the intrusion."

I called out to him from the entrance as I made my way inside.

"Oh, if it isn't Michio-sama! What brings you here today to my fine establishment? Do you perhaps want to do business?"

"That depends. What kind of goods are you selling here, exactly?"

"Oh, just a little bit of everything. This is the only store in the entire village after all. As for the amount of goods we sell, the exact amount depends on how much we order from the city and how long it will take for them to get delivered, hence the occasional shortages."

So that's why all the counters and shelves are almost empty? Awful. This level of

civilization is just the worst.

“Can’t you do something to always keep some of the goods at hand instead of waiting for them?”

“Even if I wanted to do so, the only type of goods that could be managed in such a way would be slaves for sale. And that is, you know…”

The merchant spoke quietly.

I understand what he was getting at. Even if he wanted to do so, slaves were not a commodity that could be easily obtained even when there was a high demand for them, and they cannot be stored in warehouses like fruits or vegetables. They might not have any rights in this world, but that would be too inhuman of a treatment.

Wait a minute, does this guy think I’ve come here to buy a slave for myself?!

4

All right, time to defuse the situation.

“Sorry for mentioning something so weird. I guess I am a country bumpkin after all, hahaha…”

“Even the biggest country bumpkin should know that this is how it works in the countryside. Michio-sama, could it be…”

Fuckfuckfuckfuckfuckfuck!!!

“… that you allowed the tales from travelling merchants go to your head too much?”

SAFE!!!!!

“Y-Yeah, I guess I just took their words for absolute certainty everywhere in the world. How thoughtless of me.”

“No no, it’s fine. I was like that myself until I learned the truth the hard way, so allow me to warn you in advance: even in Veil you won’t find many such merchants in Veil, since they dwell mostly in bigger cities.”

“Oh, really? I had no idea it was like that. Guess the stories I’ve heard were really blown out of proportion.”

“Small wonder given that the folks from bigger cities like to exaggerate to us rednecks from the sticks, so don’t worry about it too much. Now that you know how it is you’ll be able to properly distinguish truth from fiction in the future.”

“And what about those bigger cities? Are they far from small villages such as this one?”

“Veil is the closest one, but as I already said, it’s far from being counted among the bigger ones. Nevertheless, people from the neighboring villages tend to go there quite often. As for the bigger ones, they were originally small villages too, but they grew considerably in size the more merchants and peddlers came to live in them. Nowadays, going to one big city from the other would take you around five days by carriage. I do occasionally make trips to the bigger ones, but for the most part I tend to stick to Veil, so that is where I’ll be going tomorrow.”

Yeah, I know that much, that’s why I agreed to go with him to sell the Bandit equipment in the city in the first place. As the merchant continued his lengthy explanatory exposition dump, I decided to reset my character once again.

Since I’ll be trying to sell that equipment for as much as possible, maybe investing some Bonus Points in Haggle & Barter skill would be useful? When I added a point to it, I got a message that from now on the prices I will receive for every item I will sell will be 10% better. Hmm, will that amount increase the more points I will put into it? After trying it out, the percentage of the increase in obtained gold rose to 15, 20, 25 and 30% respectively. Just like Bonus Weapons and EXP related skills, it looks like it can be upgraded to Lv.6 at best.

Now the most important question here is: will that skill be usable, or was it a total waste of Bonus Points?

“If it’s all right with you, I want you to take a look at that Rabbit’s Fur.”

I interrupted the merchant’s diarrhea of the mouth and changed the topic.

“Rabbit’s Fur. Why of course, I can buy it off of you, but a fair warning, don’t expect to be paid much for a single… piece…”

He tried to mouth off again, but when I placed all the Rabbit Furs I have obtained today

on the counter, he became silent in an instant.

“I asked the Chief if there were any monsters around the village and he pointed in a general direction where the Slow Rabbits were dwelling, so I disposed of a few of them. Well, maybe more than a few, now that I think about it, but the point is, I’m not selling just a single piece.”

“No way… impossible…”

The merchant stares at the furs in disbelief and swallows so hard that I was able to hear him clearly from the other side of the counter. Why is he acting so surprised? Ah, could it be…?

“You know, the Chief warned me that these Slow Rabbits were quite strong so I was skeptical about hunting them in the beginning, but it turned out they were total pushovers.”

Except for the Caerbannog one, but I am going to keep that one piece of info to myself until the day death claims me and my body will be put six feet under.

“P-Pushovers?! These ferocious predators?! That is… that’s… no, I am sorry. If you are a bona fide Adventurer then of course such beasts would be nothing to you. Forgive my offense, Michio-sama.”

“None taken.”

I understand that for normies with normie stats and normie equipment those monsters could have been undefeatable, but right now I am no longer a normie so there is no reason for me not to boast my strength.

“So? What’s it going to be? Are you going to buy those furs off of me or not?”

I asked him the most important business question.

“O-Of course I’ll buy them!”

Now that’s what I wanted to hear.

“Michio-sama, if I may ask, have you joined any Guild or considered joining one in the near future?”

“I have not joined any Guild and I have not thought about it yet.”

That was not a lie on my part. I didn’t even know there was a possibility like that.

“When you join a Guild, the one I belong to for example, all the merchants belonging to it are contracted to sell you additional goods aside from the ones offered to the general public and they will buy everything you decide to sell them at preferential (read: better than usual) prices, all because the trading profits are the major source of the guild’s income. Of course, I will be more than happy to buy it even without you joining our Guild.”

So there is such a complicated restriction when it comes to purchasing goods in this world? Then maybe it will be in my best interest to join a Guild after all. But for now…

“Then please do.”

“The usual Guild price for one piece of Rabbit’s Fur is 10 Nar.”

“I understand.”

I don’t even know if it’s a high price for such an item or not.

“I see that you have a total of 10 Furs and they are all of excellent quality, I will buy them off you for 130 Nar total.”

130? If the usual price was 10 Nar per one piece of fur then the total should be 100 Nar, so that means that my Haggling & Barter skill worked and I have received a 30% better price. It actually worked! This is pretty neat! I can definitely use that! And if the merchant is willing to buy those items from me for such an exuberant price then I guess I have nothing to complain about.

The merchant takes the Furs away from me and places thirty copper 10 yen coin-looking coins and 10 white coins on the counter. If I had to take a wild guess then that one coin which is probably silver must be worth 10 Nar and the copper ones should be worth 1 Nar each. Time to count them just to be sure I’m not being scammed here.

“26, 28, 30. Everything seems to be correct.”

But how am I going to take all of those coins back with me?

“Um, do you… happen to have a coin purse or something?”

“Unfortunately I don’t, but you can use this bag if you want.”

And he handed me a small pouch for my newly acquired coins. And since the top is tied with a string, then it means it must be a drawstring coin purse. I placed all of my coins in there while thanking the merchant for being so considerate of me.

“So Picker-san, you said you belong to a Merchants Guild, right. Would you mind telling me more about that?”

I secretly performed Identify on the merchant to learn his name. Identify is pretty convenient for things like that.

“As a certified merchant I belong to a Merchants guild of course. There are a few exceptions like the Adventurers Guild, but in most cases joining one is required for working in a specified field of business or changing Jobs.”

So that would mean I’d have to do the same if I wanted to change my Jobs, but I’ll ask him for confirmation just to be sure.

“So if I wanted to become a merchant myself I’d have to join the Merchants Guild?”

“You want to be a merchant, Michio-sama?”

He asked, visibly surprised, so I hurriedly denied it, saying that I was just considering the possibility.

“Allow me to say this: whether you are a member of the Adventurer’s Guild or Merchants Guild, you can only belong to one Guild at a time, and there are strict restrictions for quitting the Guild once you have joined.”

“Hmm.”

Well shit.

“But do not worry, Michio-sama. Even without a Guild membership, merchants will still do business with you.”

“But in order to have access to specialized goods I’ll have to join a Guild anyway, right.”

“Yes, and in addition to that, every Job Change needs to be approved at a Guild Temple.”

Great. More needlessly complicated procedures to rain on my parade.

“If you already have some experience working as a merchant then all you have to do is register at the Guild and be approved at its temple. But if you don’t have any experience in that field whatsoever then I’m afraid that getting approval won’t be an easy task.”

He seems to know what he’s talking about very well, so I should make it a point to attentively listen to what he’s saying and ask my questions accordingly.

“So what about the village farmers.”

“All members of the Farmers Guild.”

Even they have to be registered in the Guild? That’s crazy! Is there even a Job that does not require joining a Guild to obtain it?!

Multiclassing is considered a Bonus Skill by the game, so it would seem that an ordinary person can only have one Job at a time. But then, what about the odd Jobs such as Thief, Villager or a Hero?

You can only join one Guild, so I will have to carefully consider all my options before making a final choice.

5

I returned to the Chief’s house and had dinner. After that I returned to my room and waited for a few hours, but no matter how long I waited, Teirichi-san did not come to visit me.

I knew it would be like that. I knew that well, but still some part of me wanted to believe that maybe luck would smile upon me this one time. But alas, this was not meant to be. It would be too good to be true.

…I wonder if it’s because I’m not some handsome-looking Chad?

So I just spent my night alone like a total loser, crying myself to sleep.

I feel like I was dreaming, but I cannot remember about what, exactly. To be honest, I was a little surprised that I didn't wake up to the hustle and bustle of Tokyo, but instead there were the sounds of a typical countryside.

By the way, my illusion that this world was a virtual one was finally crushed when I felt like my bladder was about to explode, so I hurried to the bathroom to relieve myself. This feeling was too real to be something that was just fabricated by my brain. But of course there was always a chance that all of this is just a hallucination and I was really stuck in a coma in some hospital with machines sustaining all of my bodily functions. If something like that would end up happening, I don't know if I even want to wake up from such a dream. No, this was now the world that I would have to live in. As far as I know for now, returning back to Earth is impossible for me.

"Nnnnnnnnnn……"

I slowly stretched my arms as I laid back on the bed. It was very poorly made, just a thin mattress and an even thinner blanket laid on top of simple wooden boards. I wonder if this is the standard for all people who live in this world or is it just that poor country bumpkins have to put up with something so uncomfortable?

"Excuse me."

I heard the Chief's voice outside the door.

"It's the Village Chief, Michio-sama. I'm sorry to be bothering you this early in the morning, but it is time for the wagon to the city of Veil to depart."

"All right, I'll be there shortly."

I got up from the bed and went downstairs with all my luggage, that is a copper sword and a drawstring bag. Inside of the bag were all my money and the Intelligence Cards obtained after the battle with the Bandits. For now, those things are my entire property.

"Good morning, Michio-sama."

"*Yaaaaawn* Morning."

"We took care of cleaning the clothes you were wearing yesterday. Here you go."

Inspecting the surroundings closely, my jersey was indeed lying on the table near the entrance.

“Ah, that’s right. I had this bad boy with me as well.”

I can’t believe I managed to forget about it so easily. Of course the sword and the bag were not my only assets! There was my trusty jersey as well!

The front door of the house were open, so I peeked outside and saw that it was still relatively dark. The sun has only just begun to rise on the horizon.

I took my jersey, which was now cleaned of all the blood that had stained it during yesterday’s battle and returned the clothes the Chief had lent me to him. For the current me, this jersey felt like the second skin. I don’t know what I’d have done if I wasn’t able to wear it anymore.

“Your clothes seem to be made from some highly unusual material. It must be something highly valuable.”

“You think so? It’s considered pretty common back where I come from.”

It’s just a cheap jersey, identical to the hundreds of thousands of other jerseys you can buy in Japan but judging from what he said they probably don’t have clothing made of polyester fibers in here. Such a material probably doesn’t even exist here.

“Feel free to use this bag if you like.”

And he presented me with a rather large bag which had what looked to be shoulder straps on it. Could this be a backpack?

“Hooo? That’s nice.”

“And here is your breakfast. Please enjoy it during your journey.”

“I’m sorry for making you do all this for me.”

I politely thanked him for the backpack and the food. I placed all of my current belongings into the backpack and closed it. Well, it looked extremely cheap and worn out as heck, but hey, in my current situation I will make use of whatever I can.

“Please, it is the least I can do to thank you for saving our village.”

With that, he handed me another small bag.

“Huh?”

When I opened it, I saw it was filled with coins. They were all emitting a dull, yellowish glow. Are those… gold coins? It looks like there are more than 10 of them in there.

“I know it’s not nearly enough to fully repay you for your…”

“No, no, it’s fine, this is enough, really.”

Feeling a little embarrassed, I decided to accept the reward he was offering me with gratitude.

“I’m really sorry I cannot give you any more than that.”

I once again assured him that this much was more than enough. I wanted to put an end to this embarrassing situation already while simultaneously avoiding looking like a greedy bastard who wanted to extort the poor villagers of all their savings. With my shaky situation, I wanted to avoid drawing as much attention to myself as I could, and it will certainly be better to be remembered by the entire village as a humble individual rather than someone who’s just money-hungry.

With my entire luggage packed up, I placed the backpack on my shoulders and followed after the Chief to the place near the outskirts of the village where the merchant was already preparing his wagon for departure.

“Good morning.”

“Morning.”

We exchanged our greetings casually.

“We will be departing as soon as it gets bright. Could I ask you to take a seat in the front beside me?”

“Fine by me.”

I got on the wagon and took my seat beside the merchant. I just hope it won't be shaking too much.

In the back of the wagon there were several items: the equipment of all the Bandits who were defeated, the two swords belonging to Teirichi-san and a small cage that resembled a doghouse. Teirichi-san's dagger was not among the items that we were going to sell.

The cage was made almost entirely out of wooden boards, with only the front having a steel fence. I was wondering what that curious structure is, but my unspoken question has answered itself before long, when a man who was accused of the item theft yesterday was brought in and placed inside.

"As a criminal he is to be taken to the city and sold to the Slave Merchant."

The Village Chief explained, probably noticing my questioning gaze.

"You don't say."

"Half of the sum obtained from the transaction will be paid to you, since you are this man's master, Michio-sama."

"Well, since I managed to get back what was stolen from me anyway, is there really a need to go that far with admonishing this guy?"

"If we did that, there is always a chance that he would have done it again since he wouldn't have learned any lesson from it. This is the only way to insure such a thing won't happen again."

So that's how it is. As much as I didn't want to, I had to admit that such a reasoning was very down-to-earth. Besides, an outsider like myself should really not try to meddle in the internal affairs and traditions, so I had no choice but to nod in agreement.

Before we left, a young man approached the wagon and started talking to the caged man.

"X X X

Is he a relative of the stealing man?

“X X X X! X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X!!!”

Along with the young man came a little girl, who I presumed to be the man’s daughter. Even if I didn’t understand the word they were saying, I could read more than enough from the atmosphere itself. She was probably saying things like “Papa! Please, don’t go! Don’t leave us!”. They were telling the man not to give up and resign himself to his fate, but I think that deep down inside they knew that it was a futile effort.

“It’s gotten bright enough. We’re leaving!”

Merchant took his place next to me, took hold of the reigns and in the next moment the pair of horses began to move, pulling the wagon behind them.

“Thank you for taking me with you.”

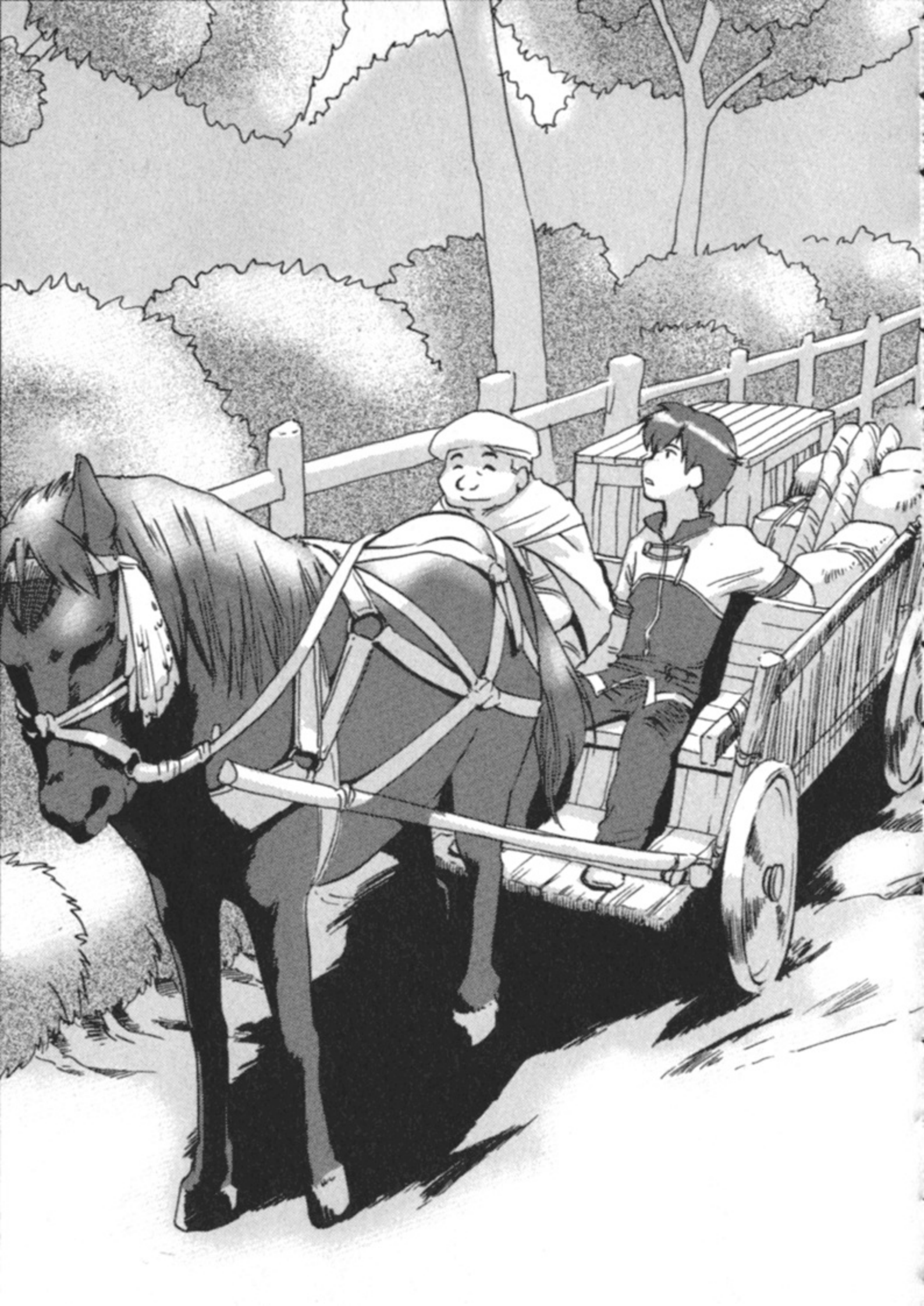
“Don’t mention it.”

Saying that it was bright enough for us to leave was a bit of a stretch in my opinion, because I could barely see the horses in front of us, but this guy has probably made this trip countless times already, so he must have been used to it by now.

The city of Veil, huh? I wonder what kind of town it will be?

6

Before we completely left the village and the Chief behind, a thought occurred to me: I might never come back here again, but for me this was my first village, my place of genesis in this strange new world.



Granted, my start in here wasn't exactly a peaceful one and I was this close to being (possibly) turned into a slave over a pair of sandals if anyone ever caught on that I stole them from that barn I woke up in, but other than that the Chief has treated me kindly, so I might reminisce about them from time to time if I ever feel like it.

For a while we were just sitting in our respective seats, taking in the sights. The man in the cage has been silent, not saying as much as a word ever since we departed.

"Are the roads safe to travel?"

I asked the merchant in an attempt to break the silence which began to get really awkward really fast.

"I'm not going to lie, monsters are known to be lurking around Veil and the roads that surround it, but they are being exterminated by the Adventurers and the town's guards on a regular basis, so we have nothing to worry about."

With each passing minute, the world around us was getting more and more bright and the wagon was also slowly gaining speed, rattling and shaking as it did so. Could it be that the roads are in such a bad shape or maybe the wagon itself is at fault here? Or maybe both of those things at once? All around us was a leaf forest, exactly the same as the one near the village where I hunted for Slow Rabbits yesterday. I don't know if it also goes that deep, but it does not seem to be the case here, or at least that is my guess judging after the trees unimpressive height. Also, because it was just the same generic, repetitive scenery all the time it grew dull on me pretty fast, so much so that staring at those trees began to hurt my eyes, and when you combine it with the constant shaking, you'll get something that's more akin to a passive-aggressive torture than anything else. So yeah, we haven't been on the road for more than half an hour and I could already tell that I was not going to have a jolly good time.

That being said, I basically had no choice but to grit my teeth and endure it. In an attempt to divert my mind from this uncomfortable feeling I tried to bite into the bread that was among the things the Chief's wife prepared for me for breakfast, but this endless shaking made it insanely difficult to enjoy even a smallest bite of it in peace. With that attempt ending up in failure, I returned to staring mindlessly into the space around me since I had nothing better or more interesting to do.

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Sigh I'm. So. BORED! Not to mention that if I don't shift my sitting position from time to time then my butt will start hurting as if it had wooden splinters piercing into it!

Then a small shadow wandered in front of the wagon. An animal, or maybe some kinda monster?

"Oh, a Slow Rabbit. So they are here as well, huh?"

"You seem to be very familiar with them already, Michio-sama."

"Well, I did hunt a bunch of them yesterday, so I guess there's no way for me to mistake them for anything else now."

That, of course, was a lot of bullshit on my part. All I did was glance at it and my "Identify" skill told me that it was a Slow Rabbit. Probably. The font its name is written in is too small to see it properly from here.

"Ah, you were right, Michio-sama! This is indeed just a Slow Rabbit. In that case we have nothing to worry ourselves with. We can continue without slowing down or having to find a way around it."

"If you say so."

The wagon approached the Rabbit and then drove past it without attracting its attention at all. If we had more time on our hands I would have liked to get down from the wagon to hunt it, but for the current moment our biggest priority was getting to Veil as soon as possible.

"Wow, we really went past it without a hitch."

Not that I wasn't expecting that to happen. If those guys were so passive and weak, then I wonder why everyone back in the village had so many problems with fighting them, to the point of pissing themselves from fear whenever someone mentioned them? Were they so weak, or is it that I'm just too strong as an Adventurer (putting the matter of my OP Durandal aside)? Be that as it may, that obstacle was now behind us. But another one would soon take its place.

From atop the wagon, I managed to spot a small, spherical shape further down the road. I tried to focus my eyes on it, and "Identify" showed that it was a Lv1 Gumi Slime. So it would seem that there are even monsters like that in here. This is much closer to the bestiary from the classic RPG games that I know about than that rabbit earlier.

"There's a Gumi Slime up ahead."

"D-Did you just say G-Gumi Slime?!"

The merchant pulled the reins and stopped the entire wagon in an instant.

"What's wrong? What happened?"

"Gumi Slime is a vicious monster that attacks any people who come near it on sight! Usually it resides only in the depths of the more remote forests, but this one must be on the lookout for prey if it wandered off onto the roads like that. Now that it has crossed our path, we won't be able to go further. We have to either find a way around it or wait for it to go away."

"We will only waste time if we do that. You stay right here, I'll go and take care of it."

If avoiding it means making needless detours and wasting precious time, it will really be better for me to fight with it. I should be able to manage just fine, especially with my Durandal.

"Are you sure about that? It's one of the strongest monsters in the entire area! It's threat level is so high that even all of the villagers would be unable to defeat if even if they ganged up on it!"

Yeah yeah, you said the same about the Slow Rabbit, and we all saw how true those warnings ended up being.

"Not to mention that if the Gumi Slime catches you inside it, your body will melt instantly!"

He explains with an expression of sheer horror written all over his face. Is it really that dangerous? Because I'm doubtful as heck about that.

If what he says is true, then I should be fine as long as I won't allow it to catch me. That and I can't cower away from any Lv1 monster just because someone tells me that it's

dangerous. I won't be able to achieve anything at all with such a noobish mindset. No pain, no gain, as they said in my old world.

"We'll be fine. You just focus on keeping the wagon going forward. I will handle the rest."

I command the merchant in the most confident tone I'm able to muster.

"A-As you command, Michio-sama. I shall trust in your judgement."

The merchant resumed the wagon's advance, resuming the sickening clutter and shaking.

While we're on the subject of fighting monsters, the Hero's Job surely must have some Skills I can use, right? If it turns out that I won't be able to beat it with Durandal, I'd have to try using those. With that in mind, I proceeded to check the Job settings.

"Over… whelming?"

Ugh, the name itself does not tell me anything. The spell has floated into my head, but should I be using it now? And more importantly, can it be used by itself, like any other Skill, or maybe I can only use it with the sword belonging to Teirichi-san?

"Michio-sama?"

"It's nothing. Keep going forward."

"As you wish. I just hope that you really know what you're doing."

That makes two of us, man. That makes two of us.

7

I took the backpack off so that it wouldn't hinder my movements and pulled Durandal out of its sheath. As an emergency I can always use the Copper Sword at my feet, but hopefully it won't come to that.

As the wagon made its way further down the road the Gumi Slime must have finally noticed our presence because it turned towards us and approached with small jumps

of its gel-like body.

“Okay, stop right here.”

“Y-Yes!”

When the wagon lost enough speed, I quickly jumped off of it and ran past the horses towards the Gumi Slime. Holding Durandal with my left hand, I swung it sideways just like I would a baseball bat. It cuts through the slime’s body from the left, makes its way through its insides and then leaves through its right side, but it merged itself right back together. Right, of course. As if the things were ever that simple.

“Deliver…… WHOA!!!!”

Gumi Slime jumped at me just as I was about to chant the spell that would allow me to use Overwhelm Skill. I waited for the last possible moment and then twisted my body to avoid getting caught in its belly. Looks like chanting Skills while fighting is impossible to pull off after all.

With my next attack I tried cutting him diagonally from above but it jumped to the side just before my blade could reach him, so I dashed after him and repeated the attack just as its body touched the ground, targeting its brain specifically. If gaming logic also applies here, random attacks at its body will only make it put itself together after a second, so the only proper way of dispatching it will be to destroy the brain.

Durandal’s edge cut through the membrane on the top of its body like it was just a wrapping paper and followed all the way through to its lower parts, spreading it all over the ground like a puddle of water after a rainy day. If my guess was correct, then it should be all over now. Hooray for video game clichés.

The remains of the Gumi Slime slowly melt away and turn into the puff of green smoke, indicating that it has been defeated. When the smoke dissipated, a drop item was left on the ground: some kinda white powder. Upon closer inspection, it turned out to be a Gumi Slime Starch. Ooooookay, I guess? I don’t want to rack my brains over how something like that came to be, so I’ll just pack it into my backpack and go back to the merchant.

So, from this one encounter there are a few things that I managed to confirm. They are as follows:

1) I can keep using Durandal to fight against the monsters, but I have to keep in mind that depending on the monster type it might not be able to one-shot them, so I need to take that under consideration.

2) Casting spells and Skills in the middle of the battle is insanely difficult, if not borderline impossible, so they can probably only be used with a first, preemptive strike. But what if I ever find myself in a pinch that would require me to use them? Looks like I'll have to practice using them in a fight after all.

Reflecting on the results of the battle in such a way, I have approached the merchant's wagon.

"I-Is it over already? Did you defeat it?"

"Yup, it's as dead as it can be."

"A-Amazing! Not only did you manage to beat such a terrifying monstrosity by yourself, but in such a short time as well!"

"Sure, whatever you say."

All I did was whacking it a few times with my Durandal, so I don't know if that is really something so praiseworthy. On a side note, I don't even want to think how many times I would have to hit that thing with the Copper Sword to kill it.

"Michio-sama, could it be that you are secretly a Mage? Did you use some incredible spell to help you finish the battle in a flash?!"

Merchant asked me in an excited manner.

"Don't be ridiculous. You clearly saw me fighting this thing with a sword, didn't you?"

Part of me wanted to tell him that I am secretly a Sword Mage, but that would be taking things too far.

"Oh, right. Now that you mention it, you also took those Bandits from yesterday down by using nothing but your sword."

No shit Sherlock. But it's not that I killed them with just a sword because I chose to do so. It's more along the lines of me slaying them with a sword because I didn't know

how to use Skills or magic at all. I can bet you that even if my very life depended on it, I'd still be unable to make proper use of them.

"Yeah. So that's that I guess. Any further questions? No? Good."

I climbed back on the wagon.

Magic has to exist in this world. It has to, since it was in the settings when I was creating my character. So I guess there are magicians here, but are they any different from normal humans?

"Oh, is that a Slime Starch, by any chance?"

"Well, yes. That Gumi Slime left if after I have defeated it."

"How about this then? I will buy it off of you for a special price that you won't get anywhere else as a commemoration of your incredible achievement. It will certainly benefit you more than keeping it."

A merchant gave me a business offer. I will give him my answer, but first I have to make a quick Character Reset to reinvest the 63 Bonus Points I've put into Bonus Weapon 6 into increasing the purchase price by 30%. After my Durandal disappeared I closed the Status screen and got back to talking with the merchant. I just hope he won't find what I just did to be weird enough to start questioning me about it.

"Yes, let's do that."

I handed the Slime Starch over to him. Was my Reset done in time? Will I receive that 30% better price?

"Thank you very much. To tell you the truth, the Slime Starch is dissolved in water as an ingredient to make alcohol, the so-called Slime Liquor. It's a beverage that many people tend to enjoy."

"Hoo?"

"The normal market price when selling Slime Starch is 40 Nar, but as a special thank you for protecting me and my wagon from harm, I would like to buy it off of you for a special price of ten times that amount, plus an additional 30 % since you are my personal business partner since yesterday. In other words, I want to give you 520 Nar

for this Slime Starch, Michio-sama."

"Well, in that case I don't think there is any need for me to hesitate, is there? I will gladly accept your offer."

Ten times more than 40 Nar gives 400 Nar, so that 520 must be after applying those 30% from my Bonus Skills, so for a price of redistributing 63 Bonus Points I will receive 5 silver and 20 copper coins. I placed them in the drawstring bag and placed it in the backpack afterwards.

"Is it difficult to become a mage?"

I asked because I was genuinely curious about that.

"I guess you could say that. In order to become a mage you have to eat a special medicine before reaching the age of five, but the only ones who can afford it are nobles and the children of millionaires. Personally I have never saw any mages in these parts for as long as I live."

"Really? Wow."

Who knew there was such a ridiculous restriction in order to become a mage? If that's the case then I guess I won't be able to become a mage myself, huh? And here I was hoping I could try using some magic since this is a fantasy setting.

While I was thinking about all those things the wagon continued to go forward at a steady pace, until suddenly the walls of trees came to an end and the walls of the city came into my field of view.

"Ohhhh, is that the city of Veil?"

"That it is indeed."

"It's quite big."

Is the length of the wall more than one kilometer? The town must really be pretty big. Of course, it is still small when compared to the modern Japanese cities. Nevertheless, building such a wall in a world like this one must have cost a ton, so this city must be quite rich if they managed to build something like that.

Outside of the walls there were fields spreading all the way into the border with the forest where city residents plowed the earth. The sun was still only about halfway in its journey across the sky, so if we include the time for that battle with the Gumi Slime, the journey from the village to the city took around three hours, so I think I can safely assume that the passage of time is roughly the same here as it is back on earth.

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"I don't want to sound like I'm bragging, but this city is the best one out of all the ones built in this region."

The merchant says.

Aside from our own, several merchant wagons were gathering near the ramparts, making a queue that was coming and going in and out of the city. The city of Veil had a main gate, but there was no gatekeeper to guard it and no one was conducting any kind of checks or inspections.

"Is everyone free to enter the city as they please? There are no restrictions whatsoever?"

"But of course. The walls themselves are not high since this is not a castle town and they won't be able to stop those who posses the Movement Magic or other means of teleportation so everyone just stopped being bothered with such procedures."

Movement Magic, huh? So they even have such a thing here? Truly, if this world possesses such methods of travelling then upholding the checks at the gate that pretty much everyone can bypass would really be a futile effort.

Huh? But then… what is that wall even here for? If a war was to ever break out, I'm sure that the soldiers could be transported magically over it, without any need to come out of the city on their own feet. Also, if there is something as convenient as movement magic here, then why did we waste our time with coming to Veil by a wagon in the first place? And do they have any countermeasures against the monster attacks?

"Hoo boi."

I had so many things that I wanted to ask about, but for now the best course of action would be to wait until we will get ourselves into the city proper.

A few minutes later we had passed through the walls and found ourselves in the city.

“We will pay a visit to the Slave Merchant first, then we will go to the station of the Knights Order so you could turn the Intelligence Cards in and then we can go to the Weapon and Armor shops so you could buy yourself some new equipment. Is that okay, Michio-sama?”

“Sure, no objections here.”

We proceeded through the town along the wide, cobbled road. The buildings on both sides of it were all well-kept and about four-five storeys in height. For a civilization where goods and building materials are not as easily accessible like in modern day Japan everything looked to be relatively advanced. The streets were busy and filled with lively, energetic people, but not to the point where you could call this entire place chaotic. Quite the opposite, actually. All in all, this place seemed like a good town.

I activated my Identify Skill out of curiosity and saw that the people who were walking past us were a mixture of various professions, like villagers, farmers, peddlers and even warriors. To think that such a menagerie could actually coexist in peace.

“If you keep going straight along this main road you’ll reach the city’s center, but for now we’re going to take a right here.”

“Okay.”

And the wagon turned right at the nearest intersection.

“A fair word of warning: the neighborhood where the Slave Merchant is located is a place where it’s best to be on guard at all times if you don’t want to wind up involved in some… shady situations. There are also brothels and sex shops nearby, but I wouldn’t recommend using their services if this is your first time in a city like that. Besides, and don’t take it the wrong way Michio-sama, but you look a little bit too young to be partaking of the services offered by the prostitutes.”

And he looked at me like I was some kinda kid who needs to be babysat at all times.

“I’ll be sure to take that under advisement.”

He probably thought I didn’t even know what a prostitute was. Haha, joke’s on you asshole, because I know very well what a prostitute is and exactly what kind of

services they tend to provide. Granted, I have never visited any brothel and used said services, but I saw many movies pertaining to the subject, so I have all the theoretical knowledge I might need, so maybe, just maybe the time for me to get rid of my useless V-Card and enter the forbidden, dazzling world of adult, sensual fun.

After all, since this is a medieval setting, then the demand for the prostitutes must be quite high and there are bound to be a lot of them. However, with the poor security around the walls and the unrestricted entry to town it is possible that most of them will either be nestled near the slums or they are going to be controlled by gangs or other criminals, just like in my own world.

This matter will also need to be investigated in more detail. I mean, it's a standard procedure, right? In order to get to know the potential dangers of this new, strange world it would be best to experience and clarify them for myself after conducting an exhausting, complex research. Yeah, right, let's go with that argument. Huh? What's with that disgusted look like I was a sentient piece of unburnable trash?! This is a survey! A scientific practical survey of another world and the dangers that might lurk in it! Moreover, I have to conduct it personally in order to achieve the best possible results! I can't just rely on somebody else's (in this particular case, the merchant's) words because that someone might be biased against that particular profession, rendering his opinion useless from the scientific standpoint. That is why I am going to JUST DO IT! I WILL MAKE! MY DREAMS! COME TRUE!

As soon as we turned right from the main road, the wagon stopped at the second house. Could this be the Slave Merchant's dwelling? It sure looks like an ordinary, red-bricked, three story house to me.

"Good morning and welcome. How can we be of service?"

When the wagon came to a halt, a young man jumped out of the doorway almost immediately. A quick Identify revealed that he was a Lv3 Merchant. If his level is so low, then this must mean that he is still just an apprentice.

"I'm here to drop off the criminal who has dared to commit a crime of stealing from a hero. Check the cage at the back of the wagon if you would."

Going with the merchant's instructions, the Slave Merchant's Apprentice did as he was told and removed the sheet that the cage at the back of the wagon was covered with. After that he examined the caged man for a bit and then said:

“Very well. Please follow me inside the store.”

And we followed after him.

“Since I told him you’re a hero, we’re bound to receive a good price for that slave.”

Merchant whispered that to me so that the apprentice couldn’t hear us. Well of course we’re going to get a good price. I mean, I have my 30% Better Prices Skill on and everything, so that is the only result we should be expecting.

“The master will be here shortly. In the meantime, may I ask for the document of ownership necessary for the purchase?”

“But of course. Here you go. And here’s a copy for you, Michio-sama.”

The merchant… I’m going to call him Picker-san from now on, it will be easier that way. Picker-san produced two documents and handed one of them off to me.

“And this is?”

“An official Deed of Slave Ownership signed by the Village Chief.”

Oh, so I even get to have written confirmation of me having a slave, huh? That’s neat, but also a little disturbing at the same time. I continued to look at it while we were guided to one of the rooms at the back of the shop, clearly meant for taking guests in.

Soon after we made ourselves comfortable on the large leather sofa, a man appeared before us. He looked to me in his forties and Identify revealed that he was a Slave Merchant. In other words, he was the owner of this whole establishment. His level, 44, was also the highest I have ever seen since I came to this world. Or could it be that this village where I spawned was a literal stick in the mud in the middle of nowhere?

“I am Alan, the owner of this shop.”

“Michio. Kaga Michio.”

“And I’m Picker, a Merchant from the village of Somara. Pleased to make your acquaintance.”

“The pleasure is all mine.”

We stood up, greeted each other and sat down again. But damn, this sofa is really comfortable. Could it be that this Alan guy could afford to buy such a luxurious item because of how much money he was earning from the slave trading business?

“The main gate looked to be quite lively. Did something happen?”

Picker-san began with a little small talk.

“So I take it that the two of you don’t know yet?”

“Don’t know what?”

He glanced at us and revealed some curious information.

“A Labyrinth was found two days ago.”

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“A Labyrinth you say? That is definitely a most curious bit of information.”

Ah, a Labyrinth, huh? Cool, that’s very neato, especially since I can’t remember if the setting I chose for my game was the one that had both open world and dungeons or only one of the two. But since they mentioned that it had been discovered only two days ago then this must mean that it is a setting with both of them after all. I guess for now I’ll just sit here quietly and gather as much information out of their conversation as I possibly can.

“Did you encounter any monsters outside of the town?”

“Not strictly outside of Veil, but we did run into two of them in a rather short amount of time.”

“Twice, huh? Then maybe that means that the activity of other Labyrinths and monsters outside of them will also start to increase? Hmm… which monsters did you encounter?”

“First it was a Slow Rabbit, but the second one was a Gumi Slime!”

“I see. That must have been pretty rough on you, huh?”

Alan the Slave Merchant asked Picker-san with a tinge of honest worry in his voice.

“It would have been if I was alone. But thankfully Michio-sama, this upstanding young man here, happened to be travelling here with me today and he took care of that wretched monstrosity before I even had the chance to blink!”

“This young man took such a monster down alone? I don’t want to be rude, but he certainly does not look like the fighting type to me.”

“I thought so too when I first met him, but yesterday he also helped to defeat a Bandit party that tried to raid the village where I usually do business and he defeated the most of them all the while saving the lives of the villagers and the village’s chief, so he has proven himself to me more than enough.”

Man, it felt incredibly good to be praised this much, but it was also making me super uncomfortable since I am not used to being complemented at all! Also, was that Gumi Slime really that strong? Or maybe it really was, but I just couldn’t notice it because I fought it with Durandal and defeated it in three attacks? Anyway, it would be best to change the subject as soon as possible or else my poor heart might not be able to handle all those praises!

“Y-You know, that man would have probably tried to steal that equipment regardless of me being there or not. Not to mention that I just happened to be in the village by sheer coincidence.”

“That may be so, but it does not change the fact that it was you, not anyone else who helped the village, Michio-sama, and that he tried to steal a part of the equipment that was your part of the spoils of battle. I see that you are uncomfortable with him being your slave, but trust me, this is for the better.”

“I agree with him. Now, may I have a look at that Deed of Ownership?”

“Oh, yes, of course. Here you go.”

I gave my document to the Slave Merchant.

“Are there any changes to the usual deal that I should know about?”

“I wish to relay half of the selling price to Michio-sama.”

Picker-san explained to the slave Merchant as he was reading through the Slave's Deed of Ownership.

"Certainly. I see no problems with that."

"If I may ask, how much is that going to be?"

"It has been confirmed that the man you wish to sell is in good health and should have no trouble with performing manual labor, so I think that I'm going to offer you the usual price of 30,000 Nar."

I don't know if that is a high price or low because I don't know the inner workings of the slave market, so I just looked at Picker-san. He nodded his head lightly.

"I see. This is indeed a good price."

"I'm glad we are on the same page here."

"Then as I said before, I'll have half of that sum paid to Michio-sama."

Looks like my Skill that should give me a 30% increased price did not work this time. Maybe it's because of my current Job settings? Or perhaps the fact that the transaction wasn't made with me directly?

"Is this your first time using the slave selling services, young man?"

Alan the Slave Merchant asked me directly.

"Yes. This is my first time coming to this city after all."

"I see. Are you an Adventurer? Or do you plan to become one in the near future?"

Eh? Why did he ask such a thing? Could it be that my face looks like that of an Adventurer? Yeah right. What kind of an Adventurer wanders around random villages repelling Bandit attacks and stealing Sandals from old barns, am I right?

"I am not an Adventurer just yet, but I do plan to join their Guild in the near future."

"So can I assume that you will also be interested in buying yourself more slaves in this near future?"

Wait a minute. What did that guy say just now?

“Like, uhm… are there… Well… Are there many Adventurers who buy themselves slaves?”

I finally managed to connect my words into a relatively normal sentence.

“Of course there are. More than you think, actually.”

Buying myself a slave, huh? I never even though of such a possibility, probably because in modern times slavery have been long since abolished and no one would even think of going back to those dark times. But this world is vastly different from my own. There are slaves here. Moreover, slavery seems to be a booming branch of business. And if slaves can be sold in exchange for the hefty amounts of money, then of course the opposite should also be possible. But if that’s the case…

Would it be possible for me to buy myself a female slave?

Having… *Huff… Huff!* a beautiful girl as my slave…

The one I could order around… and do whatever I wished with her… haha, hahahahahahaha…

“If you don’t mind me asking, why are you acting as if it was your first time hearing about all this? This is supposed to be common knowledge, one of the cornerstones of this world that every citizen, regardless of their social standing, should know about.”

“Yeah, about that… you see, I apologize for asking such obvious questions, but for the most of my life I was living with my master deep in the mountains where we trained together and we were only visiting civilized places in order to restock on food and necessary supplies, so I’m afraid that I might not possess any kind of “common sense” that you all have. Sorry.”

I went for the first excuse that came into my mind. My logic was that if I spent all my life up to this point training in the mountains with no access to civilization whatsoever, it would perfectly explain my lack of knowledge as well as my supposed prowess in battle. The biggest question here is whether or not they are going to fall for it. Besides…

My strength comes from me having Durandal as my weapon, nothing else.

“Ah, now that I look at you, you do seem to be rather young, or rather like you just barely entered adulthood. I see, now I get it. You must have had it pretty rough, living a life like that, huh? In that case, do you want to go and see the Labyrinth near this city with your own eyes?”

“I have never been to one before, so that might indeed be a good experience for me. If it is not a problem of course.”

If they really have dungeons in this world, then exploring them might be a good idea. Just like every man feels like it is his duty to stick his… finger into a hole when he sees one, I feel like every aspiring Adventurer should go to the dungeon. Especially if there is a possibility of finding rare treasures or obtaining more levels in a much faster manner.

“Then I will explain it in more detail once you finish going about your business here in town. How does that sound?”

“Of course. Sorry for making you go out of your way like that.”

“Not at all. Anything if it means obtaining another prosperous client.”

I feel like we might have achieved more than simply selling a slave at a good price here. The Slave Merchant left the room for a minute and then returned with the money.

“This is the half price of 15,000 Nar, as agreed.”

“Thank you very much.”

Picker-san received the money gratefully. It was one gold coin and a crap-load of silver coins. So one gold coin is equal to 10,000 copper coins?

“And for our newest customer here a sum of 19,500 Nar as a special bonus and encouragement to continue doing business with us. We look forward to any future transactions you’ll be willing to make.”

So this time my Bonus Skill worked properly. That’s good to know, but I am not really fond of the idea of making more people my slaves. This time was an exception, but the prospect of actively ruining someone’s life like that is not particularly appealing to me. Buying slaves (female ones that is) might still be an option, but male ones are an absolute no-go.

“We look forward to doing business with you, Michio-sama. Have a nice day.”

Looks like he has already remembered my name. Great, now I have no choice but to come here again. Ah well, maybe he’ll tell me more about the Labyrinth, so I guess there’d be no harm in that.

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After our business there was done, Picker-san and I left the Slave Shop and got on the wagon again.

That latest transaction added a lot more coins to my drawstring bag, and all that just from the 30% better prices. I repeatedly glanced at Picker-san, but he didn’t seem to mind at all that I obtained more money than him for such a bizarre reason. The Slave Merchant said it was a gift to encourage more transactions in the future, but that was exactly the thing that I was the most skeptical about.

“I have accepted the money, so I guess there’s no backing out now, huh?”

But both my mind and my heart were telling me that getting any deeper into that slave business was a bad idea. I mean, in my time slavery has been abolished in its entirety and even thinking about buying one could be considered a serious crime! But this world seems to have its ethics code taken straight from the Middle Ages, so I guess to them buying and selling slaves is no different than buying things at your local grocery store. I know I myself said that I should get used to living in this new world as soon as possible, but that didn’t change the fact that doing something I was taught was wrong to its very core still made me feel uncomfortable.

After returning to the main road, we proceeded down to the city’s center.

“It’s so lively in here.”

There were various stalls on both sides of the road selling various items: food, clothing, etc. and people were gathering near every one of them in large groups. A few of them even had people who looked like priests and street cooks. I couldn’t help but to think on how many of those people are your ordinary citizens and how many of them were actually Adventurers.

“The building over there is where the Order of Knights is located.”

Picker-san pointed towards a certain building placed at what looked to be the city's central plaza. It was a tall brick building with a bell tower. Apparently that was our next stop. When we parked the wagon outside of it, a young-looking knight came up to greet us. Identify told me that he was a Lv4 Knight, so since his level is so low then that must mean that he is still technically a squire, right?

"X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X."

"X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X. Michio-sama, please give me the Bandits Intelligence Cards, would you?"

Picker-san asked me as he held out his hand.

"Oh, right."

For a moment I completely forgot that our only goal in coming here was to exchange the Bandit's Intelligence Cards for… presumably money? I took the backpack off my shoulders, opened the drawstring bag, took the Intelligence Cards from it and handed them over to the knight while Picker-san did the same. The two ones he handed over are from the two Bandits that the villagers managed to defeat. I wonder if he'll be able to see something that I wasn't able to see on them. I mean, I already tried looking at those Cards earlier to see if they had any information about a possible bounty on their heads, but ultimately I found nothing of the sort.

[I will now check your Intelligence Cards as well.] [Please do.]

The merchant held his left hand up and brought it backside up to the Knight's face.

"Investigate the will of the flowing spirit, the wisdom of Intellect: Intelligence Card, open!"

He chanted a short spell, after which the letters appeared in the air above the Intelligence Cards. So he's going to check our personal information as well, huh?

This is bad. Now he's probably going to check my Intelligence Card as well! But do I even have one of those?! And what am I going to do if it turns out that I do not?!

He looked at the merchant's Card for a while and then he nodded his head and handed the Cards back to Picker-san who nodded back at him, and then he turned his gaze onto me. Well, here goes nothing. Without much of a choice I stood before the Knight

and raised my left hand towards the Knight's face, imitating Picker-san's movements as closely as possible.

"Is this okay? Did I do it right? Will that do?"

"Investigate the will of the flowing spirit, the wisdom of Intellect: Intelligence Card, open!"

My heart was pounding like crazy the entire time he was chanting the spell, but much to my relief, the Card popped out of my left hand just like it did when the merchant was doing it earlier. That's one bullet dodged, but I still felt somewhat anxious when the knight began to scan the Card with his eyes. What is going to happen now? Is everything going to be okay?

"And… how is it? Is something wrong?"

I asked the knight when he was staying silent for a good while now. I am afraid of that silence.

"You have a last name? Are you a Freeman?"

"Y-Yes?"

I think I just shit myself a little.

"Very well. Please, come with me."

Looks like I managed to pass for now.

The knight entered the building and went to one of the rooms that looked like an office and we obediently followed after him. While we were doing that, I had a look at my own Intelligence Card.

<Kaga Michio: 17, Male, Villager, Freeman>

All of the information about me were written neatly with kanji. Are kanji the official writing in this world? Also, maybe having a last name was a rare thing here? Not to mention that it was my first time hearing that I was a Freeman. Are the Freemen different from normal people here? Maybe they are someone who the nobles dislike?

“So, what was that all about?”

“He was checking whether you had one of the criminal Jobs or not. If you had, then you wouldn’t be able to collect the Bounty, since they canoot be handed over to criminals.”

Those words made the world around me freeze in place. I have a THIEF JOB!!!!! But the Job that was listed on my Intelligence Card was a Villager, so that would mean that only the First Job is visible to other people checking your Intelligence Card. Having Villager as my first Job was a little lame, but now I am happy to have it. That way, I will be able to avoid any unnecessary clashes with the law!

“I-Is that so?”

That was all I could say before I heaved a heavy sigh.

I tried pulling the Card off my hand, but no matter how hard I tried to do so it just refused to leave. I pushed it back into my hand, grabbed the tip sticking out of it and pulled gently, causing it to retract back. Even though it was sliding in and out of myown flesh, I didn’t feel any kind of discomfort. So mysterious.

“We will check the Bandit Intelligence Cards inside. I’ll be back with the results shortly, so please wait here.”

Taking advantage of that brief moment of waiting, I asked Picker-san:

“A question: how do you extract the Intelligence Cards in ways other than the owner willingly showing them to you?”

“When a person is killed, their Intelligence Card is going to be ejected approximately 30 minutes after death.”

Picker-san explained matter-of-factly. So what I can understand from it is that you cannot get your hands on Intelligence Cards or steal them if the one bearing it is still alive.

A short wait later, a beautiful female knight came out of one of the offices. Identify revealed that she must have been one of the big shots in here, because she had a noble-sounding name and her level was much higher than that of the guy who was in here with us. She was a beautiful lady with a tight-looking body that even the armor could

not hide, even though her chest was medium in size at best. She had her flax-colored hair tied in a cute ponytail, but I bet that if she let them down they would reach all the way to her slim waist.

“Are you the one who defeated the Bandits that raided the Somara village yesterday?”

And she directed her sharp, piercing gaze straight towards me.

“Y-Yes, that’s right.”

“That was a band of brigands who had their base of operation in the slums of this town. We are currently in the middle of the operation to root them out, but some of them managed to flee from the city before we could bring them all to justice with our steel. Am I correct to guess that you’ve been paid for the two of them, but not for the rest?”

Miss Beautiful female Knight glanced at Picker-san.

“Yes Ma’am, that is correct.”

She then looked at the knight who led us here as if she saw something filthy stuck to her shoe, sighted deeply and snapped her fingers. Not 10 seconds after another Lv4 Knight came running to her with a white leather bag in his hands.

“This is the prize money for the Bandits. Take it.”

And she threw the bag at me.

“Uwah!”

That was sudden, but thankfully I managed to grab it before it hit the ground. Wasn’t that kind of a dick move?!

“There, you have your money. Now if that’s all then I suggest you to go away quickly if you don’t want to cause any more trouble.”

And she left without saying anything else to us.

Eh? That’s it? Just like that? Nonono, at least this once let me behave like a proper human being!

“I’m sorry for the trouble! And thank you very much!”

She stopped for a second and glanced at me, but said no other words besides that. Huh? What’s going on? Has my sincerity not reached her? Did I mess up again? She didn’t say anything. No words of thanks, or not even an explanation on how the village could be under Bandit attack even with all the knights in the city?

“Don’t beat yourself up over it, Michio-sama. A majority of the knights come from the noble families, and they always tend to look down on us commoners.”

Picker-san says that as we make our way back to the wagon.

I know that. I understand that much.

But I still think that’s wrong.

Why is it that the only ones who can get along with beautiful girls are hot-looking fuckbois from high society?! I thought that something would change once I decided to leave my old world behind, but apparently my luck has not turned for the better at all.

11

“*Sigh* So, where are we going next? Weapon & Armor shops?”

I asked Picker-san in a tired voice.

“That’s right.”

And the wagon resumed its travel along the paved road.

As for the prize money from the bandit’s Intelligence Cards, I have put it into the drawstring bag in my backpack, just like everything else. I wonder if my Skill also worked on it? If it really works on the basis that the money had to be handed to me directly then I guess it probably did work, so I guess that whole mess of a situation at the guardhouse was all in all worth the trouble, since now I should have quite a sum of money to purchase everything else that I’m going to need. At least one thing worked as intended here.

The weapon and armor shop was located just a short distance from the central plaza,

so we didn't have to travel far to get there. When we entered, the first thing I saw was a greatsword in a huge display case in the middle of the shop. Identifying it revealed that it was a Steel Greatsword with 3 Skills, which made me think that it could be a pretty decent weapon. When we initially entered the shop there was no one behind the counter, but when the bell above the door rang, a man soon appeared from the shop's depths. He was a Lv11 Weapon's Merchant. So apparently this world can have many separate Jobs even when it comes to merchants and salesmen, not lumping them all under a single category.

"Welcome to my fine establishment. How can I be of service?"

"We would like to sell some equipment."

Picker-san said and proceeded to present the Weapons Merchant with all of the equipment that was at the back of the wagon.

"Hmm, let's see now… Souls dwelling in weapons, release your power! Weapon Appraisal!"

Weapon Merchant chanted the spell and began examining the Copper Sword.

BA-THUMP BA-THUMP! *BA-THUMP BA-THUMP!*

Uwaah, for some reason having the weapons appraised like that made me just as nervous as when that Knight from earlier was checking my Intelligence Cards. But on the bright side, appraisal of weapons should go a lot smoother than that previous endeavor and it shouldn't end with a nerve-wracking emotional roller-coaster, or at least I hope so with my whole heart. Also, if there are spells to examine Intelligence Cards and weapons specifically, then could it be that there are also spells meant for identifying Bonus Skills?

"How is it?"

"How many of those do you have?"

"Copper Swords? 18 of them in total."

"Then I will buy them off of you for 250 Nar per piece."

That was the Weapon Merchant's offer. Picker-san closed his eyes and nodded lightly,

and I can totally see why. That's going to be quite a nice sum, even if it has to be distributed among the villagers in the end.

"Very well."

"Next, that Iron Sword. I can buy it for 1000 Nar."

"Oh really?"

"And then…"

He picks up the Flame Rapier and looks at it for quite a while.

"What's it going to be?"

"This weapon, the Flame Rapier, I see it has a Skill on it. In that case I'm willing to pay 18,000 Nar for it."

I kinda expected the numbers to be different for a weapon that has a Skill on it, but for it to be that much?! I looked at Picker-san and he seemed to be just as surprised as I was, but nevertheless he nodded in acceptance once again.

"I am content with that amount."

"And 500 Nar for that Scimitar."

He says so after barely glancing at the Curved Sword that was among the weapons we intended to sell.

"Is this a price that include the Skill Slots?"

"With all due respect, Mr. Customer, please don't try to be smart with me. This weapon has no Skills in it, so I can only offer the usual price for it."

That's what he said. So you want to tell me that even as the Weapons Merchant he is not aware of the existence of the Skill Slots?

"No no, of course it doesn't have any Skills, I'm not going to argue with that. By the way, what price would this sword here fetch?"

I handed the Copper Sword from my waist to the Weapons Merchant. It was the one with the empty Skill Slots that I obtained from killing the Bandits.

“Souls dwelling in weapons, release your power! Weapon Appraisal! This is just an ordinary Copper Sword. 250 Nar and not a single Nar more.”

I didn’t like how this asshole emphasized the word “just”. That Copper Sword is not the same as the other ones, because it has empty Skill Slots. As I thought, this guy simply cannot see them for some reason. Okay, that’s fine, I just confirmed that Skill Slots don’t have any impact on the item’s price at all. All that matters are the Skills themselves.

“All right. We’ll sell the Scimitar along with the other swords.”

“Thank you very much. Since it’s such a large transaction, I’m going to give you a special offer and accept all of them for a total of 35,550 Nar. How about that?”

Is that the effect of my Bonus Skill? But this time the transaction wasn’t made directly with me, so it shouldn’t activate. Argh, I honestly don’t know what is going on anymore!

“Do we have ourselves a deal?”

“I believe we do.”

“Very well. Please wait a minute while I get the money.”

The Weapon Merchant went to the back of the building again and returned with the money shortly. He had three gold coins, five silver coins and an assload of copper coins. I took my share of the coins without even counting them because at this point it is just too troublesome.

“Thank you very much for your patronage.”

“Pleasure doing business with you.”

I put all of my coins in the bowstring back and gave Picker-san the two gold coins.

“Those two coins are the entire village’s share, right?”

“That’s right, Michio-sama.”

“I gotta say, this is quite a lot for that number of items.”

We managed to sell all of our Copper Swords, Iron Sword, Flame Rapier and two Scimitars for a total of 20,000 Nar.

“Right? Even I’m surprised we managed to sell all of them for so much. I guess luck is on our side today.”

Yeah, right, luck. And the name of that luck is my 30% Increased Prices Bonus Skill. Go ahead, thank me, praise me for it!

……what? A man can dream, right?

Next shop we stopped by was the Armor Shop.

“Since the Bandits who attacked the village didn’t wear any armor we have nothing to sell here, but if you want to become a proper Adventurer it is a purchase we just can’t neglect, Michio-sama. Don’t worry about the price and just pick whatever will best suit your needs. If it’ll be necessary I will lend you some of my personal funds.”

“Thank you for the offer, but I don’t think going that far is going to be necessary…”

“No no no, this is once again to express my thanks to you for saving the village. If you hadn’t shown up, it is quite possible that as one of the wealthiest villagers I would have been killed and had my goods and savings robbed. It is no exaggeration to say that I probably will never be able to fully repay you for what you did yesterday, so allow me to do whatever I can, when I can.”

You say that, but such gratitude from a guy is kinda gay in my book. Then again, at the very least you thanked me. Teirichi-san, on the other hand, did not visit me during the night to thank me with her body.

We parked near the shop and went inside the shop, browsing through all the different pieces of armor before we decided that the best fit for me is going to be a Leather Breastplate and a pair of Leather Shoes and we called the shopkeeper.

“Welcome, welcome, oh esteemed customers! How can I be of service?”

I glanced at him with Identify and confirmed that he was The Armor Merchant. Man, they are really going all out with how many Jobs this World has. Could it be that every

merchant has his own Job depending on what he is selling? Because if that really is so then the possibilities are literally limitless!

“Yeah, we would like to buy this Leather Breastplate and these Leather Shoes and also sell this Bandana here.”

“Souls dwelling in armor, become an unbreakable wall! Armor Appraisal!”

Armor Merchant took the Bandit Bandana I presented him and appraised it with his spell. I would very much prefer if they did it normally without using magic, but if the appraisal can only be done in such a way then I guess there’s no helping it. While we’re on the subject of magic, I wonder if everyone can use every appraisal spell, or is it limited in such a way that Weapon Merchants can only appraise weapons and Armor Merchants can only appraise armor?

“So? How much for it?”

“First things first: what the hell is this?”

Armor Merchant lifts the bandit Bandana and waves it in front of my face. Is he also going to suspect me of something shady just because I had an item which had the word Bandit in its name?!

“A Bandit Bandana. What of it?”

There is no sense in trying to fool him so I just gave him the name of the item without even trying to hide it.

“Oh, so you do realize what this is? Then again, you look surprised so allow me to give you a free lecture, kid: This is a Bandit equipment. It raises the physical abilities of its wearer, but only if he or she has a Bandit, Thief, or any Job that is connected to being an outlaw. Bandits could pay you up to 10,000 or maybe even 20,000 Nar for it, but since this is a normal store, I’m afraid I cannot accept this.”

So it’s only useful for Bandits and the like? All right then, since he won’t even touch it let’s just leave it at that then.

“Okay, just forget about it and let’s do business with something else.”

I put the Bandit Bandana away and continued to sell the other goods to him.

Well, I have a Thief Job, so technically Bandit Bandana should be of use to me. I'll have to test it if the opportunity to do so ever presents itself. But for now all I can say is that buying and selling things in this world appears to be needlessly complicated, so if I want to make my life easier in the future I need to make a mental note to limit such escapades as much as possible or else my poor Japanese heart won't last long.

CHAPTER 3
ROXANNE

1

Player Name: Kaga Michio

Character Information & Equipment:

Class: Villager Lv.3, Hero Lv.1, Thief Lv.3

Accessory: Ring of Determination, Sandals

Successfully selling all the stuff to the merchants meant that I have succeeded in doing everything that I've set out to do in the town of Veil. This means that as of this moment, I am free.

When that thought occurred to me, I felt both happy and somewhat empty inside. Sure, I can do whatever I want without anyone bossing me around and telling me what to do, but now that Picker-san and I went our separate ways, there was no one here who knew me.

The reality that I was now alone in this foreign world hit me like a truck-kun hits a protagonist in an Isekai-story. That thought alone almost made me have an anxiety attack, until I remembered that I was technically not alone after all. That's right, there is one more person whom I got acquainted with very recently, like, not even two hours ago.

The Slave Merchant! He must be waiting for me to get back to him so he can relay the information about that so-called "Labyrinth" to me! Since he offered to give me that information himself without me pestering him about that, it would be really dickish of me not to go and hear what he has to say, right? But first…

I went into the shadows of the alleyways behind the Armor Shop with my new equipment in tow. I decided that it would probably be best if I wore the Leather Armor

over my jersey for some extra protection, but I placed the Leather Shoes and Bandit's Bandana back into the backpack. That bandana is different from the ordinary ones, so there is always a possibility that those in the know will recognize it right away, so if I wear it in public, I might end up being mistook for an actual bandit, and that is the last thing I want to be dealing with. Finally, I had the Copper Sword on my back and two Scimitars at my waist. That is the closest to being a samurai as I can possibly get at the current moment.

I made sure that no one was walking near me or looking at me and opened the bag with the prize money. It contained a total of 16 gold coins and a lot of silver coins, meaning that the total prize was more than 160,000 Nar! It's great that I have so much money now, but the sheer amount of coins weighing down my string bag began to feel like a great inconvenience. For someone like me, who is used to using the 5 or 10 yen coins, suddenly switching to the currency of this world which seems to be going up every 100 coins might require some getting used to. Also, if I remember correctly, the Village Chief gave me 15 gold coins total just before we departed from the village. I don't know if they are of the same exact value, but it should be almost as much as the prize money for those defeated Bandits. All right, time for some quick math!

15 gold coins from the Chief plus 16 gold coins from the bounty for the Bandits plus the two gold coins from all the shopping and selling I've done with Picker-san… so it should be 33 gold coins in total. In addition, I also have a lot of silver and copper coins. Since the gold ones are the ones that are worth the most, I'll put only those into the drawstring bag, and then put it at the very bottom of the backpack in order not to lose them. Okay, now I should be ready to move on.

I left the back alleyways and returned to the city's main street, which was still as busy as it was when we came here. Taking a closer look at the stalls, I noticed that aside from humans, non-human races were apparently also present here, and in surprisingly large variety. Tall, short, covered with fur, scales, even those with sharp ears… sharp ears? Elves! So there are even elves in this world?! And wow, there are many more female ones than males, and… and… and OH MY GOD they are even prettier than the ones depicted in mangas, anime and books from my own world!

Now then, simply staring at the female shopkeepers like some kinda pervert would probably get me in trouble with the authorities, therefore the best course of action will be pretending that I am interested in buying the products they are offering and have a gander at them during that window shopping.

One of them was especially beautiful and had nicely shaped big breasts, so I spent the most time at her jewelry stand. Now, I know for a fact that when it comes to age elven looks can be very deceiving, so I tried checking her out with Identify, and the result is… Age: 37? Shouldn't it be like, 370 or something, since she's an elf and all? I mean okay, as long as she looks like she just passed her twenties (in other words: perfectly smashable) I'm fine with that. Oh and by the way, when I tried to Identify myself to see if it would display my age, it only showed my name and gender.

After a short walk I came back to the Slave Merchant's shop, to which customers were coming and going as if they were out buying groceries. Welp, I get this is a world totally different from mine, but honestly, I expected at least one person to act suspiciously or nervously look around as if they have stolen something. Am I the strange one here, or are all those people not right in the head? Probably it's the former. Also on a side note: while I was walking around the stalls ogling the nicely looking ladies I tried to listen in on the other people's conversations in hope of gaining information about the typical slave's market price, but that plan went out the window pretty fast because most of them weren't speaking in Brahim, so I simply couldn't understand a word they were saying.

"Hello? Is now a good time? Am I not bothering you?"

I asked after I finally mustered enough courage to go inside the shop.

"Ah, the young lad from before. By all means, do come in."

The one to greet me was the same apprentice as before.

"Is Mister Alan here? I would like to talk with him about the matter we discussed earlier."

"Certainly. Come and have a seat while I go fetch master for you. He'll see to you in a moment."

I was shown to the room next to the entrance to the shop, not the one in the back. Could it be that this Alan guy has different rooms for different "business" purposes? Am I going to be treated like an official customer now?

This room was literally littered with expensive-looking furniture, complete with fluffy carpets, leather sofas, paintings on every wall and a big table and a pair of chairs made from what looked to be a dark oak. This must be a customer reception or something

along those lines.

“Welcome back to my fine establishment, Michio-sama! I have been waiting for you.”

The owner, Alan, came to me right away. I haven’t even sat yet.

“Y-Yeah, right.”

“But where are my manners? Please, sit wherever you like. Make yourself at home.”

I took his advice and sat on one of the sofas. It was even more comfy than the one I sat on when I was here with Picker-san.

“Before we get any further, there is something I would like you to know about the man you sold to me today.”

“Yes? What is it?”

“I had a little bit of a… friendly chat with him to get to know him better, as per the usual procedure in my line of business and he revealed to me information that might be of interest to you. That man became a slave because he committed a crime of stealing the Bandit Bandana, which was among your spoils of battle, right? Well it turns out that he didn’t commit that theft alone. He actually had an accomplice, unfortunately, he didn’t want to share his name no matter how… nicely… I asked him to do so. Do you understand what am I going at, Michio-sama?”

“Yes, I do. Thank you for telling me, I’ll be sure to remain careful.”

Bandit Bandana is an item that raises the stats of anyone with a Bandit or Thief Job so criminals were ready to pay a high price for it. If that guy wanted to steal it from me, then that means he probably had someone willing to buy it off of him. I don’t know who that someone might be, but I think we can safely rule out the Village Chief and his wife since they were very helpful to me after I helped stop the attack on the village and nothing in their behavior pointed towards them having any kind of ulterior motives. Maybe it was Picker-san? He’s a merchant after all, and they mostly have only one principle in their line of business: to sell to the highest bidder. Then again, dealing with bandits was probably too risky for someone like him. For all I know, when the transaction would have been completed they might have just offed him to get away with both the item and the money. Then, who might that supposed accomplice be?

But that is a matter for later. For now, let's focus on the task at hand.

"When I came here earlier, you mentioned something about a Labyrinth, right? I would like to hear about it in more details, but first, where exactly is it located?"

It might be best to ask him about everything I want to know about before we get down to business.

"It has been discovered in the forest just west of the town."

"Meaning the opposite of where we arrived from."

"That's right."

When we departed from the village, we followed the sun as it made its way across the sky, meaning we were going from east to west. So in order to reach the Labyrinth, I'll have to keep going west from the city's other gate, got it.

Shortly after we began our discussion, a female servant came to the room, carrying a luxurious tea set, probably with refreshments for me and Alan-san. But those clothes… could it be that she's…

UwU, what's this? A maid?

SWEET STRAWBERRY SHORTCAKE ON A ROCK N' ROLLIN JESUS WITH A FISHSTICK THEY HAVE MAIDS HERE!

Ok, that's it. This world is the best world ever!

2

IDENTIFY HER! IDENTIFY THIS PICTURE-PERFECT BEAUTY RIGHT THIS INSTANT!

Roxanne: Female, 16

Beast Warrior Lv6

So her name is Roxanne, huh?

She is very pretty, no, beautiful, no wait, words cannot describe how much of a hottie

she is! She's on a totally different level than the models and idols I knew from the Internet and TV back in Japan. Unlike them, who are basically made to look and act the way they are for the sole purpose of making men flock to them, she feels like something truly genuine, untainted by the corruption of show business (thank God that they don't have it here!). I mean just look at her! Truly an angel unfit to walk this dirty soil!

She has gorgeous pale-red lips and a pair of big, shining eyes, and her hair, colored like the finest of chestnuts look so irresistibly fluffy that I just want to bury my face in them! And she even has that typical maid hat… looking… thing!

"Here you go, sir."

美人。ものすごい美人である。
いやすごい。この世界の美人は地球より上だ。
メイドはクロウサーヌというようだ。

She placed a filled cup in front of me. When she was doing so, her rich breasts, clearly too majestic to be contained by the dark blue dress she was wearing under her maid apron were visibly swaying back and forth. Dayum girl, who would have thought that you're going to have such a nice pair of bazongas on you? Also, today is such a great day!

"Thank you very much."

I answered simply.

Maybe that's just me not paying enough attention, but most of the clothing in this world seems to be rather loose and bulky, which makes it somewhat difficult to properly appraise the size of a woman's bust. But in Roxanne's case? Every article of clothing was tightly sticking to her body, as if they were made that way on purpose.

This is a shocking, quite shocking discovery indeed, wouldn't you agree, my dear reader?

Even when she finished bending over to place the cup in front of me and returned to her normal, graceful standing position, her breasts continued to sway and jiggle, drawing my eyes to them as if they used some kinda hypnosis spell on me!

"As I said before, the entrance to the Labyrinth has only been discovered about two days ago so it hasn't even been fully explored yet. We currently don't know exactly how big it is nor how long will it take to clear it."

"Uh-huh, I see."

Whatever the merchant was talking about came in through one of my ears and immediately left through the other, because the entirety of my attention was focused on Roxanne's chest. Height-wise it looks like she's the same as me or a little shorter, so about 160 cm. I couldn't tell exactly because of the clothes, but if how tightly they fit her is any indicator, she shouldn't have any excess fat on her, except for her marvelous breasts of course. Like seriously, they must've absorbed all the nutrients from her meals in order to grow this large. Perhaps it has something to do with the fact that, as pointed to by her Job, she is not a human, but a demi-human or beastfolk of whatever non-human species are called in this world? It does not look like she has a tail or a pair of animal ears on her, but those may well be hidden from view by her uniform.

Oblivious to everything that was happening inside my head, Roxanne walked to the

table at which Alan-san seated himself, gave him the cup and poured him the same drink she poured me. He picked up the cup and slowly raised it to his lips.

“Oh please, Michio-sama, don’t mind me. Have a sip yourself.”

“Ah, right, sorry about that.”

Since he said it’s okay for me to have a sip then I guess I’ll do just that. But it would be nice if it was just some herbal tea and not something that has alcohol mixed into it, since technically I am still just a minor, although by Japanese standards. If I’ll have some free time on my hands I’ll have to obtain information on what is the drinking age here. And maybe the age of consent while I’m at it.

Urged by the Slave Merchant, I put the cup to my mouth as Roxanne leaves the room.

“So? What do you think?”

“Hmm…”

He asked me that, but I barely managed to drink any of the cup’s contents, so I had to make the answer up on the fly.

“It’s not a bad drink, to be honest. I’ve never tasted anything like this in my life so far.”

“No no no, I’m talking about the girl. Looks like she piqued your interest.”

Who, Roxanne?

“Oh, her? Well yes, she’s certainly an eye catcher, that one.”

“Right? Out of all the slaves I have in my inventory right now, she’s probably among the best ones. And the one I would recommend the most.”

Ah, now I see. I understand what it was all about. So Roxanne is not a servant. She’s a slave as well. One of the best ones, huh? I definitely see why he would want to do that. And I guess it makes sense. After all, Alan-san is a Slave Merchant, so why would he recommend anything else but slaves to a potential customer such as myself?

“Allow me to cut right to the heart of the matter, Michio-sama. If you’re going to set your sights on exploring the Labyrinth, buying a slave would be the best course of

action for you."

In that case, would I be able to buy any one of his slaves? Even the beauty such as Roxanne?

"What I mean is, you're going to need to form a Party, since tackling a dungeon like a Labyrinth on your own would be nothing short of suicide."

Debatable, seeing as how I have my OP Durandal with me, but let's assume that he's right for now.

"… Keep going."

Of course, that Party stuff does not interest me all that much. All I really want to know is if I really want to buy Roxanne as my personal slave?

I suddenly feel very hot, like all the blood has rushed into my head. I wonder if my face is red right now? This is not good, dude. Calm down, just try to calm down before you do or say something stupid! I might still be a kid, but that does not mean it's okay for me to do and say everything I want, consequences be damned. Come on, me, think with your head, not with your dick!

"With a Party of your own. You'll be able to hunt monsters and earn money more efficiently. Of course, there are Adventurers who prefer to go solo, but all in all it is more beneficial to have a large Party, up to six members total."

"Y-Yes, of course."

So Party's can consist of up to six members? That information might prove to be useful in the future. Being free as a solo player is my preferred option for now, but having someone to share my travels with might not be such a terrible idea either. We'd be fighting together, eating together and sharing the stories of our lives while doing it, make a name for ourselves as famous Adventurers and sleep in the same room at an inn to cut costs… wait, sleep together? Sleeping… together with Roxanne… if I bought her…

"Naturally, the problems begin when it comes to splitting the loot obtained from adventuring, like magical items or platinum coins. The Labyrinths are mysterious structures that we don't know everything about, but we do know that by clearing it you can get rich very fast at the risk of injury and quite possibly death."

So I assume that a platinum coin is worth even more than a gold coin? I could probably easily buy Roxanne with one of those babies in my purse…

But wait. If Labyrinths really are filled with such treasures, then what about a situation in which one member of the Party decides that he wants to hog it all for himself?

“What about disputes over items and money? Do they happen often?”

“Thankfully not that often, but there were times when some Adventurers desired some items to such a degree that they were willing to turn their blades on their fellow Party members.”

“And how were such situations resolved?”

“Simply and effectively. Eye for an eye, tooth for tooth. In the Labyrinth, if a Party member attacks you with an intent to kill you, you are legally allowed to defend yourself, by any means necessary.”

“I see.”

The most logical option here would be to continue to go solo in order to avoid such flaming messes, but if I do that, the possibility of buying Roxanne might be forever out of my grasp! Ugh, this is so frustrating! I know I shouldn’t think about it, but I just can’t get that thought out of my head!

What do I do? What the fuck should I do here?! To buy or not to buy myself a slave, that is the question! But the right answer to that problem is nowhere near in sight!

3

On the one hand, I know that buying and owning slaves is morally wrong. After all, it was outlawed in my world for a reason. But on the other hand, she is such a beautiful girl that I felt that if I won't step up now and claim her as my own, such a chance might not present itself to me anymore, and I wouldn't be able to forgive myself to the end of my life if something like that ever happened. I need to make a decision now!

"Of course, if your Party consists of people you know you can trust with your life, there will be no problem with betrayals. Or if you still worry about that, you can purposefully hire the people who are weaker than you. Thankfully, cases of such happenings are fewer now than they were just a few years ago."

He was practically spoon feeding me valuable information, but Roxanne was all that I could think of.

If this was a game, having conflicts within the Party wouldn't be such a big deal. Worst case scenario your in-game character would die and simply respawn at the nearest church/temple (whatever the spawn point was) and you could go on to exact revenge on the Party member who thought he could screw you over. Even in MMORPG's, where the interaction was almost exclusively between living, thinking players stuck together for better or worse, the possibilities for betrayal and PK (Player Killing) were limited by the game's systems.

Reality, however, was a totally different nut to crack.

No matter where you go, people around you are all ultimately complete strangers whom you don't know if you could trust at all. I mean seriously, let's consider the following: you're going to the Labyrinth with your Party members, you fight monsters, one of them drops some valuable item that one of your Party members wants so badly that he's willing to kill for it, and he does just that. What am I getting at? Considering that death is probably nothing unusual in a monster-filled dungeon like a Labyrinth, no one would probably even be suspicious when someone would die in there, since the culprit would be able to just play the whole thing off as a "He bit off more than he could chew" scenario. And while we're on the subject of valuable drops and treasures…

"A question, if I may. While in the Labyrinth, is it possible to get stabbed in the back by one of your Party members?"

“There is such a possibility, yes.”

I knew it. It would have been too good if that wasn’t the case. Knowing that she might as well try to kill me if she doesn’t find me to her liking or that if the opportunity to run off with a valuable treasure presents itself to her, do I still want to buy Roxanne?

“I see. That’s not nice to hear.”

“However, Parties consisting of a master and his slave have some unique rules to them. Since a slave is a possession of its master, the same principle applies to any item or money the slave might obtain.”

That’s one concern out of the way. But if I want to make Roxanne mine, there is still one thing that I have to know about.

“Hypothetically speaking, if I bought Roxanne from you, would she be able to stab me in the back and run away with the treasure even though I’m her master?”

“Something like that would not be possible. You see, master and slave are bound to one another by a pact. If the master dies, his slave dies with him.”

“For real?! Isn’t that too harsh?”

So if Roxanne ends up being bought by someone else and that someone kicks the bucket, she will bite the dust as well.

“Perhaps, but everything depends on how the master intends to live out his life. And if you decide that you no longer want a particular slave as your property, you can always release them from servitude or prepare a document which transfers the ownership rights to someone else.”

“Oh, so there is such an option. That’s good, very good.”

Knowing that I can release her before I die was a very useful piece of information. Sentencing her to die prematurely simply because something happened to me would be too cruel.

“But if you aim to be an Adventurer, and one who aims to explore Labyrinths at that, you might as well prepare such a document beforehand, although having it on you would amount to nothing if you ended up devoured whole by some monster or

disintegrated by a trap. My best advice would be as follows: if you want to have slaves, you'd better resign yourself from exploring Labyrinths or other dangerous places. Or know exactly when to tuck tail and run if you value your life. I know that for someone young and eager like you the prospect of being an Adventurer might be the one which yields the biggest financial gain, but trust me, there are more safe, stable ways of securing a source of income. Not to mention the fact that you'd need to have a place where you and your slaves could stay, eat and sleep and I'm not talking about renting rooms at an inn all the time. If you want to be a slave master, your own house is an absolute necessity."

I'd definitely want to provide Roxanne with a place where she could live, eat and sleep in peace. Especially sleep, with me in the same bed… Nonono kid, get your goddamn head out of the gutter and start taking this seriously by thinking of anything other than doing morally questionable things to that maid girl and that bombshell body of hers! I want to stop with the lewd fantasies that go through my head, but try as hard as I might, the picture of her perfect tits and the vision of what I would do to them…

"On the bright side though, if you manage to pillage enough treasure from one successful Labyrinth raid you'll have enough money to quite possibly afford a comfortable lifestyle for the rest of your days. But there are a few things that you also need to have in mind before making the final decision. First, when it comes to their status and social standing, slaves are only slightly above Bandits. Actually, the biggest difference that sets these two groups apart is that you are legally obliged to kill Bandits, Thieves and other Brigands and you can claim their possessions as your own whereas killing a slave who has its master is considered a punishable offense. But those who ran away from their master are treated just like any criminal."

So they are only slightly above Bandits and their ilk, huh? Looking at someone like Roxanne, this is truly hard to believe.

"Besides adventuring, are there any ways to make money?"

"Of course there are. As long as you'll be a member of a proper Guild and are willing to learn the ways of your new trade, you can become anything you want."

"Okay, I get it."

The biggest problem here is that you can't form a Party with anyone unless you trust them. I came alone from Japan to begin with, but even before getting isekaid out of the

blue like that I had severe trust issues coupled with disdain for other human beings, who I assumed were all out to get me and pour salt onto my open wounds, so how can anyone expect me to form bonds of trust with the denizens of this world when I don't even know what are the laws of this land and what counts as common sense here?!

And will I be able to procure enough money to buy food for both myself and Roxanne without delving into the depths of the Labyrinth? Well, I can always not buy Roxanne and begin my career as a solo Adventurer. With a weapon like Durandal by my side making a name for myself shouldn't be anything difficult.

"So how about it, Michio-sama? Would you be interested in buying Roxanne? She's a Beast Warrior, so I'm sure she'd be a great addition to your Party."

"Beast Warrior…"

"Yes, because she's a Werewolf. Beast Warrior is a Job that only a Werewolf or other Beastman can acquire."

"Werewolf huh? Gotta say, she doesn't look like one at all."

Of course I knew about her Job and its level because I used Identify on her.

"Well, what do you say? Pretty tempting offer, am I right?"

"Yeah, but…"

"And to top it off, she's the most beautiful one among the female slaves I happen to have in stock now. With her stunning looks and the intellect to match it, she'll be a perfect companion for a first-timer like you. And she's a Werewolf Beast Warrior at that!"

The Slave Merchant continued to pour his honeyed words down my ears.

This is nice and all, but I need to keep a clear head. I mustn't make a hasty purchase under the influence of that sweet-talking of his! Besides, there must be a catch somewhere! There always is!

4

But… but maybe this time it was actually an honest deal with no trickster strings attached? It would be strange to sell someone so beautiful as Roxanne without having some hidden agenda, but maybe that's just my damaged mentality speaking again?

"So, why is her being a Beastman so important? Because you seem to be making a great deal out of it."

"Are you familiar with the saying that elves are the number one non-human race when it comes to their lifespan and longevity?"

"Well, yeah."

I mean, isn't it common knowledge that elves tend to live much longer than humans? Or could it be that this is another thing that's different in this world?

"Then allow me to break it to you: that is just an urban legend."

Oh really now? That's interesting.

"Elves are said to be the longest living race because they stay young-looking for the longest. In actuality, the lifespan of Elves and Beastman are about the same."

"Is that so? I have to admit, I didn't know that."

The eleven woman I ogled back at the street shops was supposedly 37 years old when I Identified her, but she looked like she was in her early twenties at worst. But I have to say, when it comes to looks as a whole, Roxanne was even prettier than that elf lady. And her boobs are definitely bigger.

"That's understandable, so don't worry about it all that much, Michio-sama. We humans and non-humans have different points of aging and ways in which we perceive the passage of time. To illustrate it with an example, I think you'll agree that for us humans there is little difference between a two years old dog and the one that is eight years old, right?"

"Now that you mention it, I guess you're right. I never given it much thought myself."

“When it comes to Beastman, at the age of 16 or 17 they are no different than us humans, but the older they get, the difference becomes more apparent. Typically, we humans start to show visible signs of aging around 40 to 50 years of age, but when Beastman hit that same mark, they still look as young as they were in their teenage years, so from the perspective of our limited lifespans, the Beastman might as well stay beautiful forever.”

“Ahh, I see.”

Roxanne is one year younger than me and she’s already so beautiful that it was unbelievable. So you want to say that even when she reaches her forties and fifties her looks won’t change much from how she’s looking now?

“In addition to that, there is one more very important factor that sets the Beastman aside from other races, a factor that is held in very high regard by all of the customers.”

“And that factor is?”

“Since they are half beasts, or animals if you prefer lighter terms, they are unable to bear human offspring.”

“Oh.”

So people do tend to consider that aspect as important, huh? I honestly didn’t think that anyone would pay any mind to something like that in a world based on medieval settings. Then again, that would mean that I could just go at with Roxanne over and over again without worrying about any pesky consequences nine months later.

“To that end, the dear Roxanne is still a virgin, if that matter is of any interest to you.”

She’s still a virgin? *Smacks lips* Nice!

“Does her being a virgin have any impact on her price?”

“It does, but for a practical reason. With virgins, you don’t have to worry about contracting any sexually transmitted diseases. Of course, we do have proper establishments of the sexual nature in this town, but I wouldn’t recommend using them even if that was the last place of its kind in the entire world. If anyone asked you didn’t hear it from me, but to be honest, instead of listing the diseases the local prostitutes have it would be faster to list the ones they don’t have.”

So I take it this world still has no ways of countering STDs then? Kind of a bummer, but the one to be expected, since the medicine and modern drugs should be pretty much non-existent here. Looks like that puts my plans for an investigation of brothels to a grinding halt. Nevertheless…

"Thank you for the warning. I'll be sure to remember it."

"Good. Going back on the right track, Roxanne herself is perfectly aware that she might be used as a sex slave."

"You don't say."

So she's actually aware of how she might be used by her potential owner?

"On top of being made aware of the possibility of her becoming a sex slave, she has also received all the theoretical knowledge required for pleasing any kind of customer, no matter what his kinks or preferences might be."

"Hm…"

That made me both concerned and aroused at the same time, but all my concerns evaporated without a trace as soon as I imagined Roxanne in a turtle shell bondage. Just that image alone was enough to send my youthful imagination, which I tried to keep in check, running berserk again.

"But that should come as no surprise, because, let's be honest here, if you weren't interested in those things you wouldn't have been interested in buying yourself a young slave girl in the first place."

"I guess so."

To be honest, learning that was kind of a relief for me. In this world, just like in my previous one, buying yourself a young female slave seems to have only one purpose, and everybody realizes that, so presumably I won't be the first one to commit such a (morally) dastardly deed and I sure as hell won't be the last one.

"But I have to say, Michio-sama, I am glad that you decided to pay a visit to my establishment on a fine day such as this one."

"Why is that?"

“After spending as many years in the business as I did I can proudly say that I have a keen eye for judging the customers who walk through the door of my shop, and it saddens me to say that even if many of them do want to buy themselves a female slave, many of them won’t even lay a finger on them due to their “moral compass” telling them that it is wrong. To be totally blunt, those are the kind of customers I dislike the most. The way I see it, any kind of purchase, be it a slave or something as simple as a grocery shopping, needs to be done with a leveled head and hefty amount of consideration. You know what they say: haste makes waste, right? And I think we can both agree that wasting money on something you won’t really need is the ultimate waste.”

So people like that are present in this world as well, huh? Lovely. If there’s one kind of person I hate more than bullies and those who wronged me for no apparent reason, it would have to be assholes with loads of money who always buy everything in sight, only to throw it away after realizing that they don’t really need it. Thankfully, I can say with certainty that I wouldn’t treat Roxanne in such a way.

“Well, I guess that’s right.”

“So why do purchases like that keep happening, you ask? Well If you asked me for my opinion, I would have to say that the reason for things being the way they are is simple: inexperience, both at the side of the customer who walks in here without knowing what is he getting himself into and at the side of the female slaves who are not taught proper sexual education. Thankfully, I can proudly say that Roxanne is not someone like that. She received all the necessary education needed to be proper companion for any aspiring Adventurer, so you can rest assured that she will never be a burden to you.”

“I see.”

“And lastly, as an added bonus, she is able to speak Brahim fluently.”

“Oh yeah, you’re right!”

Back when she gave me the cup with the drink I was able to understand every word she was saying, so I guess it makes sense for her to know Brahim, which must be the name for this world’s version of the Japanese language, but I guess I was just too engrossed with the bouncy swaying of her tits to notice that. And honestly, can you blame me?! It was totally amazing! I would love to see it again if I had the chance.

“And that concludes my speech on why I would highly recommend buying my dear Roxanne.”

Great, looks like his sales pitch is finally over.

Roxanne.

There is no doubt that she’s the most beautiful girl I have ever seen in my life (not that I saw many of them to begin with). Her eyes were so bright and dazzling that just one look was enough for me to feel like I was being swallowed in by them.

Can I really buy someone like her? I bent over my cup to give it one last brainstorming session with a heavy chest. Is that what the weight of freedom and responsibility feels like?

5

To tell you the truth, I still have my doubts about this entire matter, but above all else I don’t want to be left alone in this strange, unfamiliar world. If I can have myself a companion, even if it will be a slave, then of course I would like to jump at such a chance right away. What about my moral dilemmas? They are still nestled at the back of my head of course, but let’s look at it from another perspective: if I will buy Roxanne, I will do my best to treat her in a respectful manner and to one day set her free so she could decide her fate on her own. On the other hand, if someone else ends up buying her, there will be no guarantee that such a douchebag won’t treat her like nothing more but his personal sex toy, and that is something that I absolutely cannot allow. Back in Japan I’ve had my fair share of mistreatment, enough to last me several lifetimes and not wish a similar fate happening to anyone else.

The biggest problem here is that slavery is apparently a part of the system of how things are ran in this world, and it looks like it is here to stay, at least for the foreseeable future, and we all know that if there is one thing that cannot be easily changed or overthrown, no matter what world you are living in, it’s the established social hierarchy and the twisted “norms” that come with it. In my old world, even though it is claimed that we were living in a progressive, advanced society where the concept of inequality has long since disappeared, it was nothing more but a nicely sounding slogan filled with hypocritical bullshit fed to the masses who were dumb enough to believe in it. Okay, we abolished slavery because we deemed it to be too inhumane, but even with that one problem gone, a myriad of others appeared almost

immediately to take its place: illegal employment, framing, human and organ trafficking, child prostitution, those are but a few droplets which appeared in the cesspool of shit that humanity has turned into. And here's the real kicker: everyone seems to have agreed that the ones to be blamed for the present state of the earth are the members of my generation, the millennials! How fucked up is that?! And to top things off, the damn boomers expect us to fix everything while they continue to sit around on their lazy asses doing absolutely nothing! The vast majority of us are still either high school or college students, so how can they expect us to find solutions to the problems that "responsible, full-fledged adults with a great amount of life experience" can't fix even if their goddamn lives depended on it?! Also, even if by some miracle I'd be able to push this world towards the same changes that occurred in my world, the most probable scenario would be the one in which we managed to get rid of slavery, but we'd be left with the same old developmental problems that the earth is struggling with right now: poverty, overpopulation, escalation of inequality and the like. Thankfully, going down such a path is not an option right now, due to a very simple reason: as a person, I lack both the mental capacity and charisma to enforce any kind of change or push through with the development of any invention of greater significance like computers, airplanes or solar panels and electricity.

Another issue is the fact that in this world slavery is very strongly connected with the judiciary system and the apparent enforcement of justice. Just like I've seen back in the village, making someone into a slave is a valid option of inflicting punishment upon the criminals, and my guess is that option is being chosen rather frequently, since it essentially gives you either a free servant or a lot of money if you decide to sell your slave just like I did. In that case, what would be the, maybe not the best, but a good alternative to slavery? I honestly have no idea, but at the very least I feel like more prisons would be built. And not just the small ones, like those cramped town dungeons you see in video games. This world would need one giant, big-ass prison for all those would-be slaves. But in order to build something like that, money would be needed, and when we say money, it's obvious that the first thing that comes to mind is taxation, but in order to gather taxes more efficiently bureaucracy would have to be introduced, but in order for it to be introduced, we'd need to develop a better education system so more bureaucrats could be raised to collect the taxes which would then be spend to build prisons so that the people wouldn't have to be turned into slaves… man, I'm getting confused by my own thoughts and it's making my head spin!

The worst part is that bringing bureaucracy into the fray would absolutely not be the end of problems and solutions, but I don't know what should be done next because I have absolutely no idea who and what else is connected to the bureaucracy and how

in the hell are those connections making the world go round.

But anyway, I digress too much. I didn't come to this new world with the intention of becoming a perpetrator of social change or some Abe Lincoln's second coming. No no no, I came here because I wanted to kill myself and was looking for alternatives. Can we just proceed to the part where I actually get to buy myself a slave already?

Roxanne, oh my beautiful, precious Roxanne with that beautiful face and bouncy bazoongas of yours. Just wait a few more moments, I'll be buying you very shortly!

"You look as if you reached a conclusion to your inner turmoil. Michio-sama. Has my elaborate explanation helped you make your decision?"

"I guess you can say that. So, can we proceed with the transaction?"

"But of course! Now then, if you would…"

Alan the Slave Merchant reached his hand to me, and when he did so, a half-transparent window with a system message appeared in front of my eyes.

<Do you want to buy Roxanne the Slave?>

<Yes> <No>

Finally, the moment is upon me at last. I have to say, this anticipation is becoming unbearable, to the point where my hands began to shake.

<Do you want to buy Roxanne the Slave?>

<Yes> <No>

Of course I can't choose <No> here. I want to buy her in order to have a companion who will aid me in my future travels and to free her when the time would be right.

<Do you want to buy Roxanne the Slave?>

<Yes> <No>

Also, maybe she will finally be the one who will take my V-Card away from me, since both Teirichi-san in the village and the beautiful female knight from earlier showed

no interest in helping me with that. At that moment, a thought occurred to me. Nothing related to the situation at hand, but just something I was curious about.

“Is the price of sex slaves any different from the price of the normal ones?”

“No, it is practically the same.”

“Really? I thought they are going to be pricier.”

I honestly thought that was the case, since the sex slaves are mainly used for satisfying the bodily pleasures, just like their name implies.

“Their market price is the same because the differences in their duties are minor at best. Both sex and non-sex slaves mostly perform the same jobs, hence the lack of difference in their prices.”

“Then what about the differences between male and female slaves?”

Alan-san nodded and continued.

“Speaking of fighting abilities and the ability to do manual labor, men have better abilities than women. However, the price of a working adult male is about 120,000 Nar, whereas for a young woman, her price will be higher, depending on her good looks.”

It’s true that if it’s purely for work purposes there shouldn’t be any difference in price between men and women. But it’s also true that good looking girls are always very expensive, that is a principle that was true even in Japan, but they are always in higher demand than guys. That is why even if they cost more, I’m sure none of the female slaves are left to gather dust for long.

Well, the Slave Merchant’s story started to be strangely relatable. Just like in real life, women tend to have it better, even when it comes to the price for selling them. And speaking of selling, I guess I should reset my character again.

This time, I removed my points from 30% Increased Selling Prices and pumped everything into Buying Discount, which gave a discount of 30%. Okay, now we can finally start talking about the actual numbers. Bonus Skill, don’t fail me now!

“Is Roxanne going to be expensive?”

“Hm, let’s see here…”

He seemed to be counting from memory, and then he declared with a broad smile on his face. Is he content with the fact that I am finally willing to make my purchase?

“Yes, the typical market price is about 600,000 Nar.”

…

……

…….

WHAT IN THE ACTUAL FUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUU……?!

6

…UUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUCK?! No matter how you look at it, more than half a million is way too much for a slave! And that’s the price with the active 30% discount, for crying out loud!!!!

“Well, looking at your face right now I probably know what is going on through your head, Michio-sama, and honestly, I can’t even blame you for it. So how about that: since I was the one who recommended Roxanne to you, I’ll lower the price for a bit. Does 422,800 Nar sound more acceptable?”

The merchant presented me with something that must have sounded like a nice bargain price to him, but for me it was still way too expensive, even after such a significant drop.

I took a deep, long breath.

422,000 Nar. What kind of a price is that?! If only it was cut down by another 50%, then I would have jumped at the transaction without a second thought, because honestly, what other choice do I have? Right now, it’s either buy a slave and have yourself a Party companion or go solo and continue to be all by myself, a scenario I wanted to avoid at all costs.

Roxanne has absolutely captivated me. Literally everything about her screamed to me

that I should make her mine: her deep, bright eyes, her magnificent chest and her beautiful face. The biggest problem here is that I only have 33 gold coins. My ethics or personal feelings are not the problem here anymore, because I have already steeled my resolve to do this. I just don't have enough money to make the purchase, simple as that.

"Unfortunately, it looks like it's a purchase that's beyond my current financial capabilities."

"Is that so? This is grave news indeed."

The merchant replied. If he was disappointed with such an outcome, he did an outstanding job at not showing it in the slightest. I, on the other hand, was very disappointed with myself.

"I guess we have no choice then. Why don't you take a look at some of the other slaves then?"

Ahh, I see what's going on here. It was all a part of your clever little marketing strategy, huh? Oh you rascal, you. Showing me your best slave first, making me eager to buy her, only then sell me a cheaper one? It's like those brothels in my world that scam people by marketing themselves with the best girl they have in their crew just to trick people into making an appointment with her, but when the push comes to shove and they muster the courage to arrive all that is waiting for them is "The Lady Handling the Phones" who says that the girl you were supposed to meet up with is either busy with another guy, or that she's sorry but she couldn't make it in time and then just as you're getting ready to leave you're "graciously" offered to pick one of the other girls instead, only to taken aback by how big of a step-down they are, but you can't just say no and leave with your money in tow, because some burly guy who looks like he just got released out of prison is blocking the exit and is threatening to "make you one with the floor" if you don't make up your mind soon. A very specific example, I know, but do not worry, I'm not speaking from experience. Of course a sad, little cherry boy like myself wouldn't have any experience in that field to back his stories up. It's just one of the many threads about brothels that I visited back when I was surfing the net looking for ways to end myself.

On a side note, con artists and telemarketers often use similar trick, but with their own, unique twists added. But in this particular case, I can't say that I was deceived by anyone. I just don't have enough money to buy the best merchandise available, so I

have no choice but to buy a cheaper replacement.

All right let's get this over with. I already said A, so now I have no choice but to say B.

"Very well. Show me the other slaves you have for sale."

"As you wish."

The Slave Merchant bowed down to me and showed me to another location. We went to the stairs at the back of the shop and proceeded to go to the third floor. The staircase was narrow, but well kept. Not a single floorboard squeaked under our feet.

"Welcome."

When we got up there, an older-looking lady greeted us. The only things that were present on his floor were a small corridor beside the stairs and two pairs of doors, one on the left and one on the right.

"Line up the girls for me, please."

"As you wish, master."

The lady stood up from the chair she was sitting on, took out a small key from her pocket and proceeded to open the doors to the left and disappeared inside.

"This third floor contains women's quarters. Everything here is managed by female employees, and no men beside me have the right to enter here."

"I see."

"Right now, all the girls are undergoing a thorough inspection of their virginities."

He explained as if it was the most obvious thing under the sun. But now I get why he wouldn't let any guy work on this floor. One man and so many virgins… the temptation would be too much to bear. While we were waiting in the corridor, the lady's muffled voice could be heard from behind the door. Apparently she was going through a roll call after she finished her physical examination. Eventually it ceased and she returned to us.

"The preparations have been completed."

“This way, Michio-sama.”

He guided me into the room, where many female slaves were lined up shoulder to shoulder. All of them were wearing simple, tidy clothes, they all looked properly fed, there was no excrement on the floor and the room itself was not giving off any particularly nasty odor. I guess that was understandable. They are a product to be sold after all, so they need to be kept in optimal condition in order not to scare the potential customers away.

“So these are all the female slaves you have?”

“That’s right. Go ahead and see them all for yourself. Feel free to look to your heart’s content.”

“All right.”

I walked in front of them and examined them all, one by one. A part of me regretted that they weren’t told to strip themselves naked so that I could see every nook and cranny of their bodies, but it’s better not to push my luck here. None of them were as eye-catching as Roxanne, so I haven’t decided on buying any of them yet.

They were all looking at me with curious eyes rid of anxiety and nervousness, which made me somewhat embarrassed and self-conscious about my average looks. I guess that they are judging me as much as I am judging them. I understand that they are doing so because when I finally decide to pick one of them her life is going to change drastically with me as her new master.

That is what it means to buy a slave. It’s not about grabbing yourself a free laborer or a sex toy, it’s about giving them a chance at a better life or ruining it completely.

“Is there a problem, Michio-sama?”

“No, not a problem at all. I was just amazed at how well-kept your slaves are. It’s totally different from what I was expecting to see, to be honest.”

“This should come as no surprise. I run a business here, so in order to gain the upper hand over my business rivals it is essential for me to keep the entirety of my merchandise at the highest standards of both health and clothing. Their food is also being handled with proper care. Trust me, they are better off here than they would have been back where they came from before they were being sold into slavery.”

The tone of his explanation suggested that he must have explained the very same thing he was explaining to me time and time again.

“I see.”

That was the only answer I could give him. Also, it made me wonder… this place is actually pretty damn neat, since the slaves probably don’t have much work to do aside from maybe keeping the shop clean. If not for the fact that they are going to be sold one day, they would have probably wanted to stay here forever, or at least that was the impression that I got from my time spent here and the information obtained from Alan-san’s words.

Also, the longer I looked at the girls, the easier it was for me to spot something critical:

Their interest in me was nothing but an act.

7

The first one, who was smiling cheerfully just a few moments ago now looked straight ahead of herself with tired, unmotivated eyes, as if she was about to fall asleep on the spot. Looks like she totally lost any semblance interest in me.

The second one glared at me with a smug smirk on her face, as if she wanted to openly ridicule me. She even glanced at my crotch for a brief second and snickered in a mocking manner! If we weren’t in a Slave Shop I would have probably delivered a nice haymaker right to her face, but since I can’t do that I decided it would be best to stay my pimping hand for now. Let it go Michio, you’re better than that. No need to stoop so low just because a slave tried to act like a smartass around you. Actually, it makes things much easier for me, because now I am certain which one of them I won’t buy even If she was the last girl on the planet.

“Michio-sama, I hope you’ll forgive them for displaying… something of an attitude towards you? I assure you, their intention is not to mock you, it’s just that…”

“Yeah yeah, whatever you say you’re probably right.”

Look pal, whatever their reason for such impudent behavior might be, I don’t want to hear about it. I’m not here to play psychiatrist to their troubles after all. I’m looking for a reliable companion, not the one who will be nothing but a burden to me since

day 1. The way I see it, instead of allowing girls like that one over here to do a lot of negative PR for you you'd be better off selling her to do manual labor, like maybe working at the mines or something along those lines. That way you'd still have the profits from selling her and had one less headache in your shop. But you now, that is just my opinion. Anyway…

The next slave girl had much livelier eyes than the first one, but on the flipside her face was nothing to write home about. The one next to her was pretty nicely-looking… but nope, she's a no-go for me. Identify showed me that she was a Villager at the age of 27… And that's much too old for my strike zone.

Next one was cute as well, but had no breasts at all; an absolute cutting board, the kind that a chef of a restaurant would want to borrow when they ran out of their own. The last one, the one who was after Little Miss Cutting Board was still a kid, but she was pretty cute, all things considered. And no, I didn't mean it in a lolicon sort of way, all right? I am certainly no child molester, I prefer the girls who are of my own age, maybe a year older.

My ideal girl, huh?

Now that I've seen every last one of them, I have to say that they are all pretty cute. The fact that there is some age diversity between them was definitely a plus, because I am sure that I will be able to find the one who will be just up my alley.

That is what I would have said if I hadn't seen Roxanne first.

To me, she was so beautiful that all those other female slaves looked so inferior to her that I probably couldn't see them as truly attractive even if I tried. Ugh, I fell for the merchant's trick completely. Even though I realized that he showed her to me first as a bait for buying the uglier ones (no offense ladies, except for the smugly smirking one, you can just go eat shit for all I care), but I can't do anything about it! I'm a young, healthy, impressionable guy, so what other reaction would you expect when a hot chick was placed right in front of my raging hormone-driven eyes? In light of that, there could be only one solution to my current situation: I left the room without deciding to buy any of the female slaves presented to me. Probably knowing that that's how it was going to end, the merchant left after me.

When we got out of the room, the older lady from before waited for us along with Roxanne. Did she finish all of her duties and come here to see us? Aww, now that's just precious! I knew it, she's an absolute angel!

She bowed her head to us respectfully, and it was at this moment that I saw a pair of ears adorning the top of her head.

Dog ears. They were the FUCKING. DOG EARS! OH MY SWEET JESUS, HOW CAN SHE BE SO CUUUUUTE?!!!!!!

She didn't have the maid hat-thingy on anymore, so her ears were clearly visible for all to see. They were the big, hanging fluffy ones, like those of a Golden Retriever. They also look like they could be easily hid underneath her hair if she didn't want anybody to stare at them.

"So I guess there's no use asking how it was, right?"

"Right. I'm sorry, but it looks like we're back to square one."

"That does seem to be the case indeed. You hear that, dear Roxanne? Looks like this customer took quite a liking to you."

The Slave Merchant outright told that to Roxanne. What the fuck dude?! You're not

supposed to blurt it out like that, have some compassion for your fellow man!

Roxanne just looked at me without saying a single word. When our eyes met, all I could do was to look away from her shyly. I was never good at interacting with the opposite sex and I don't suppose that will change anytime soon, but the stares were always the worst for me. Every time a girl looked at me, it was almost certain that her face would twist in uncontrollable disgust, as if I was some kinda bug that needed to be squashed under the heel of their shoe, so I guess it's only natural of me to expect Roxanne to do the same now.

However, much to my astonishment, she didn't do anything like that. She… she smiled. It's true, I'm not bullshitting you! Faintly, just faintly, but she really did smile! I… I didn't expect that at all, but I'll gladly take it.

It was a nice gesture, but it doesn't change the fact that impossible is still just as impossible as it always was. I won't be satisfied if it's not Roxanne, but I don't have enough money to buy her. I guess I should just forget about buying slaves and move on as a solo Adventurer.

"Master, if I may…"

"Yes darling, I know what you are going to say. Michio-sama, while I can't lower Roxanne's price more than I already did, I am willing to wait for a few more days."

"Huh?"

"Let's see here… you said this was your first visit to Veil so you are probably not well versed with the terrain around the city, and there's also the matter of the Labyrinth… so how about five more days to get the necessary amount of money?"

The merchant continues with his onslaught of words without giving me a single moment to wrap my head around what's happening here right now.

Is this another one of his tricks? First he showed me his finest product to then bait me into buying the cheaper ones, so now he probably wants to firmly have me in his clutches by offering me such a kindness. Was I too careless? Have I let my guard down too much because Roxanne's beauty blinded me to everything else?

"Ah, n-no, I…"

“Trust me, you’re not the only one annoyed at the fact that you don’t have enough funds to finish the transaction. But as long as you can procure the rest of the money in a few days, I will be more than willing to wait. You’re fine with that as well, right, Roxanne?”

“Yes, thank you very much, master.”

And she bowed her head to him again.

What is this? Why is he suddenly getting so cooperative? What is going on here?

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Now that he’s gotten so cooperative, there is no way for me to refuse unless I want to be taken for a complete douchebag.

I would like to believe that he’s doing it out of the kindness of his heart, but he’s a merchant. Kindness is not a part of their trade, unless they can squeeze some coin out of it. Then again, even if he has some ulterior motive, I guess it works out for me just fine. Thanks to that I will truly be able to buy someone as beautiful as Roxanne for myself. Besides, what would both of them have to gain from trying to deceive me like that?

Alan-san mentioned that she’s still a virgin, just like all the other female slaves in this store, and we have already established that it is like that because virgin female slaves are worth significantly more than fully capable male slaves. Is it about the money after all? Could it be that the Slave Merchant and Roxanne know that once I’ll set out to collect the rest of the gold necessary for the purchase I will probably have much more than that and they plan on stealing it from me after Roxanne kills me? No, that can’t possibly be the case. If it was really like that, such a plan wouldn’t have even a shred of sense, because Roxanne would have died along with me, and that would prevent both her from getting her share of gold and Alan-san from selling her to some other guy willing to cough up the dough. Well, that is all considering that his explanation about the relationship between a master and his slaves was not made up.

Another option is that the two of them were really just trying to have me buy Roxanne, using the good business opportunity to their advantage. I am willing to bet that Alan-san thinks that if I will be satisfied with Roxanne, I will be willing to purchase more slaves from him in the future, but I’m too blind to see this because my crippling social

anxiety robbed me of one of the most essential abilities we humans can have: to have a little faith in your fellow men.

“I’m glad that you are willing to give me the benefit of the doubt, but even with that I cannot guarantee that I’ll be able to procure the necessary amount.”

“In that case I’ll have to sell her to another customer, which won’t be hard at all, considering how beautiful she is.”

“So what you’re telling me is that I have to get my ass up in gear and get the money as fast as possible because other clients are ready to buy her? Is that why you gave me those five days?”

I tried to get that information out of him.

“Unfortunately I’m afraid I cannot tell you anything, Michio-sama. That is a company secret. In other words, that knowledge is none of your concern. If you really want to buy dear Roxanne, then I suggest setting your priorities to getting the money, nothing more, nothing less.”

“And here I thought you were on my side!”

“I am on no one’s side, Michio-sama. I am, first and foremost, a merchant, a man of business. As long as I get my money, the matter of who gets to be the girl’s new owner does not matter to me.”

That statement was cruel, but also perfectly logical at the same time. I should have known. Of course. He’s a merchant, the one dealing with slaves. To him, they are nothing that goods which need to be sold either to those who have the money and are willing to spend them, or to the highest bidder.

“Dear customer, as I said, as long as it’s those five days, I am willing to wait for you.”

Roxanne looked at me and smiled again. Her perfectly white teeth could be seen through the narrow gap between her glossy, cherry-like lips.

Beautiful, she’s just transcendently beautiful.

“All right. Now that that’s settled, Roxanne will be moving to the sold slave’s quarters.”

“As you wish, master. I will make the preparations at once.”

Alan-san relayed the news to the older lady. So I guess that means the game is all set now.

“Yes, be sure to do that. Michio-sama, let us be on our way. You as well, Roxanne.”

The older lady guided Roxanne to the room across the one I have previously entered, while Alan-san and I moved towards the stairs leading back to the shop’s ground floor.

“Yes. Uhm, Mr. Customer, thank you for your patronage.”

Roxanne bowed to me three times in succession, each bow deeper than the last one. Her dog ears were shaking in a cute way. Yup, the game is on for real. If I can truly have something so precious for myself, then I have to get the money no matter what!

“Let’s go.”

“Yeah.”

The two of us went down the stairs without looking back again. Okay, now that we were left alone again, I guess it’s time to do a little prodding.

“You took quite a gamble there. What if I really won’t be able to get the money? Cause it’s not like I’m some kinda magician who can conjure them up from thin air you know?”

I started the conversation as we were going down the stairs.

“Oh, I don’t think it’s like that at all. I heard that you have single-handedly defeated a group of wanted criminals. If that information is indeed true, then that would mean that you managed to earn between 120,000 to 200,000 Nar in less than one day.”

It was a guess on his part but wasn’t that much off the mark. He actually managed to estimate the amount of Nar I got fairly accurately. But even so, he still seems to be forgetting about one thing: he wants me to get 420,000 Nar to pay for Roxanne’s purchase. Now, in order to get so much money in the shortest amount of time possible, the best option would be to go to the newly discovered Labyrinth and hope to find some valuable items there, but if I want such an escapade not to be anything else than a glorious suicide method, I would have to get myself a Party first, and getting myself

a Party would mean the necessity of splitting the loot obtained from raiding the Labyrinth equally between all the Party members, and that would automatically diminish my personal gains, to the point where procuring the desired amount of Nar would be pretty much impossible to achieve.

What the Slave Merchant doesn't know, however, is the fact that just two days ago I was nothing more but a depressed teenager who wanted to end his own miserable existence, having achieved nothing and not obtaining any money at all, be it my world's Yen or this world's Nar. Even after being transported here, the only reason I was able to mop the floor with those Bandits was because I managed to obtain a ridiculously OP weapon for myself after countless experiments with Bonus Points and the Skills. Same goes for milking as much money as possible out of everyone. If not for the Character Reset option which can be used as many times as you want and the fact that performing a Reset takes less than a minute if you know exactly what you want to reset into, I wouldn't have as much dough on me as I have now. What I'm trying to say is that I was only successful so far because my "special treatment" as a player allowed me to become somewhat of a demi-god compared to all those people who thought that a Slow Rabbit or a Gummi Slime were terrifying monstrosities that should be avoided at all costs.

"I'm just saying, you should prepare yourself to be extremely disappointed, just in case."

"I will, you don't have to worry about that. But my intuition is telling me that you're going to be all right. I believe I have mentioned this before, but I have a pretty good eye when it comes to appraising people and their value as potential business partners."

Dude, where does that confidence of yours come from and why don't you share some of it with me?

With such thoughts in my mind, we returned to the guest room we were initially sitting in.

Currently there are only two ways of obtaining money that would allow me to achieve my goal. One of them was raiding the Labyrinth on my own and hoping for the best. The ideal scenario here would be that I manage to find enough valuable Drop Items to get myself at least 100,000 Nar per day, peaking at 500,000 Nar after five days. Enough to buy Roxanne, and just enough to have some spare change for some initial lodging

and food costs. Honestly though, such an outcome is extremely unlikely.

Normally, one piece of Rabbit's Fur was 10 Nar, so in order to get any significant amount of money out of it I would have to hunt a shit-ton of them, and even then I have no way of knowing if all of those encounters would end with me getting an item that I want. From the info that I have gathered so far, it looks like one defeated enemy can only leave one item behind when it dies, and it won't always be the same one. Supposedly there are also stronger monsters who drop more valuable items with higher rarity, but whether or not I will be able to deal with them by myself is unknown at this point.

Another option would be to hunt more Bandits and collect the bounties placed on their heads. If the average sum is 160,000 Nar, I should be able to get the necessary amount a little bit faster. Is the Slave Merchant's confidence in me coming from that? I… I honestly don't know if I should think of it as incredibly naïve or progressive of him.

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But I guess I am still naïve as well, since a part of me still doesn't want to admit that this is the real world, just like the one I left behind when I molested that <Yes> button. Back in the village I wholeheartedly thought that this was nothing but an ultra-realistic game, and that's why I had no reservations about turning the Bandits that attacked it into salami, and besides, I did it mostly in self-defense. But now things are going to be different. We're not talking about defending yourself anymore, we're talking about assaulting other people, criminals though they are, but that's beside the point, so that I could trade their lives for money which is going to be used not for some chivalrous endeavor, but for the scummy reason of satisfying my own selfish desires. The only real problem with this approach would be finding a sufficiently large group of Bandits or a few smaller ones near the town across the span of two days. That pretty lady knight said that the group I had dispatched in the village was the one operating in the slums of Veil, so I can probably assume that no other group would take their place, at least not for the time being. Based on my video game knowledge, all the criminals in the city will either hide in the city sewers, or relocate to their hideouts outside of the town, most likely in some caves or encampments deep in the thickest parts of the woods. Chasing them down would be another matter entirely if I knew the terrain around Veil like the back of my hand, but without such knowledge, running blindly around the forest might just prove to be a giant waste of my precious time.

As for the other ways of achieving my objective, I guess I could try doing the one thing that everyone who got sent to or reincarnated into another world would try sooner or later: use my knowledge from the time spend on Earth combined with my Identify Skill in order to multiply the amount of money that is already in my possession, but like I said before, I am just your average high schooler who knows jack shit about the economy and the processes which govern it, so I wouldn't know what to do, even if the method and resources were right in front of me. And as far as I know, there are no tricks to gain a large amount of money in literally a few days. Getting filthy rich always involves long-term investments with large amounts of risk to them.

"Supposedly the Bandits whom you have defeated had decent equipment on them. Maybe selling them to the shops here in town could be a nice way to start?"

The Slave Merchant suggested once we got back to the guest room and I sat back on the sofa. As if I didn't know that already.

Certainly, if I sold Durandal, it is more than likely that I would get 100,000 Nar for it, maybe even more. As for the Copper Swords, in my opinion they are just glorified, oversized butter knives unfit to fight not even against the Bandits, but also the weakest of monsters, so I don't think they'd even be worth that much to begin with. But since the only weapon visible to others is the one I currently have equipped, there is no way for Alan-san to know about Durandal. When I first came here, all I had on me was a Copper Sword on my back, but now I also have a Scimitar tucked on my belt. From the outsider's perspective, I guess I'm looking like some kinda weapons maniac or a sword collector.

Now let's see… combining the prize money and the money obtained from the Village Chief with the ones I would probably get for selling Durandal, I think I would be able to obtain the required 420,000 Nar pretty effortlessly.

The thing is, no matter what happens, I absolutely cannot sell Durandal. Ever. If I did that, it would be lost to me forever, and that would mean a double loss for me: that of a powerful weapon and the Bonus Points I've spent to obtain it.

Even if obtaining Roxanne is everything to me now, losing Durandal would be equivalent to losing everything, because without Durandal, I won't be able to guarantee Roxanne's safety. Losing such a valuable weapon would spell no end of trouble for both of us. No, that sword is my absolute trump card. Even if it means facing more difficulties and adversity, I can't part with it no matter what.

“If I chose to enter the Labyrinth, will I be able to make a sufficient amount of money out of it?”

I have to gather information about ways to obtain money without sounding too suspicious. First, let’s try to get as much info about Labyrinth related matters as I can.

“You can. It won’t be an astonishing amount but at the very least it will be a steady one. The exact amount would depend on your ability and luck, but I think 1000 gold is the minimal amount you could get for a single item found in there.”

It depends on your ability and your luck…

I guess so. But since the ordinary drop items would get me so little, gathering enough money out of them would still be impossible.

“1000 gold per item, huh? While that might be good in the long run…”

Right now time isn’t exactly my ally.

“Can I get sell those found items to a Guild?”

“The Explorers and Adventurers Guilds are both here in this town. The Explorer’s Guild is the second building on the right across the main road. The Adventurer’s Guild is located in the center of the town on the west side. Just between you and me, they don’t like each other very much.”

The Adventurer’s Guild and the Explorer’s Guild are not on good terms, duly noted. Having an Explorer Job might not be such a bad idea.

“What about hunting down Bandits and collecting bounties for their heads?”

“That’s certainly a possibility, but I wouldn’t recommend it, if you want my honest opinion.”

“Wouldn’t… recommend it?”

“Yes, and for a number of reasons. For example, the only place where the Bounty Hunters Guild is located is the Imperial City.”

“Bounty Hunting…”

So it can really function as a Job, huh? That was to be expected. If you can become a Thief by stealing something and a Hero by Saving a village, then by following that logic hunting down Bandits and the like should make you a Bounty Hunter.

At least I thought that it's going to be like that, but apparently I was mistaken, cause when I checked my own status I have received no such Job. Maybe it is necessary to join a specific Guild first?

"A Bounty Hunter? You need to accumulate a lot of experience at hunting criminals to obtain such a title."

"I see."

Apparently the prerequisite for that Job is to have a Warrior Job at Lv10 or so.

"Even then, you won't be able to protect everything around you simply by being strong. Hunt down enough Bandits as a Bounty Hunter, and you'll quickly gain notoriety in the criminal underworld, becoming a target for everyone willing to exact revenge or increasing their infamy. When that happens, you won't be safe anywhere, even behind the walls of the Imperial City."

From a criminal's point of view, Bounty Hunters must be their sworn enemies. It's natural for the two to detest each other. It's natural that both those groups would want to exact revenge if their members were harmed. I already murdered quite a lot of them, so… have I already been branded as a potential target?

"If you kill too many Bandits, can you end up being targeted by other outlaws?"

Looks like hunting Bandits might not be as good of an option as I have initially thought. Kill or be killed. That must be the absolute law of this world. But even if you'll be strong enough to kill many, the ones who'll come after them will eventually bring you down. History proved that to be true time and time again. Well, back in my old world at least.

"That's right. And the prize money received in this way is absolutely not worth the risk of you and your relatives being targeted by other Bandits."

Then is it possible that the Bandits I had killed during the raid on the village had extraordinarily high bounties on their heads? The ones going way above the usual price paid for the extermination of their ilk? No, that cannot be it. Picker-san counted the reward money for their slaying pretty accurately, so I guess it couldn't have been

anything special.

Either way, Bandit extermination should be my absolutely last resort. First, I should try my luck in the Labyrinth.

“All right, I think I learned everything I wanted to know now. But one last thing before I leave: if I want to stay in this town for longer, are there any inns or hotels you’d recommend? I don’t want anything fancy or too pricey, but at the very least it should be something comfortable, with good food and soft beds.”

“Those are some pretty specific conditions, but if you’re looking for something that is a middle ground between affordable and comfortable, The Veil Pavilion, an inn located at the southwestern end at the rotary in the town’s center should be the place to go for you. It is managed by the Innkeepers Guild, so I can fully vouch for their quality.”

“Okay, I will go there immediately.”

I don’t know what to think about that Innkeepers Guild, but it cannot be a bad place if Alan-san is recommending it to me. At the very least, it should be better than spending the night at the stables or with no roof above my head whatsoever.

I stood from my seat. Now that we said everything that needed to be said, there was no reason for me to stay here any longer. For now I will have to secure myself a place to stay, but from tomorrow morning, I will have to work my ass off as hard as I would beat my meat on a Friday night (hopefully I won’t have to take care of that myself for much longer).

“Then I will be anxiously awaiting your return in five days, Michio-sama.”

Sent off by those parting words, I left the Slave Merchant’s shop and moved forward towards my new goal: To gather enough money to buy Roxanne! And I think I don’t have to repeat myself, but I will do so just to psyche myself up.

Failure is not an option here!

CHAPTER 4
THE LABYRINTH

1

Player Name: Kaga Michio

Character Information & Equipment:

Class: Villager Lv3, Hero Lv1, Thief Lv3

Accessory: Ring of Determination, Sandals, Bandit Bandana

The day was still young. If the main roads in this town are designed in such a way that they are heading directly to the north, south, east and west, then the sun has moved slightly over the west towards the south. So it should be… a little over noon, if I'm not mistaken?

Now that I've gotten back onto the main road, the first place I will try to visit will be the Explorer's Guild which is in that second building to the right, according to the information I have obtained from Alan the Slave Merchant.

So that confirms that he wasn't lying: there really is such a Job as an Explorer. Just to be sure I used Identify on that one hot chick in the building and it showed me that she was a Lv17 Explorer, just like the receptionist-looking guy behind the counter.

Okay, now for the most important part: do I really have to join the Explorer's Guild to become an Explorer myself? Also, I was expecting the inside of the building to look more like a tavern, or the medieval equivalent of an office building, but if I were to draw any comparisons, then I'd have to say it looked like a primitive post office, wooden tables, counters and mailbox next to the guild's main entrance included. Several townspeople were already inside, apparently doing business with the guild's staff, because I heard sentences such as "I'll take that, then", "Sold" or "So how much is this going to cost me?" being used. If that is any indication, then I guess this place can also buy items off of you and made it possible for you to purchase whatever it is

they are offering. But I am not interested in those, not for now at least.

First of all, I'll need to do some information gathering. Listening to the people around me in hopes of catching something interesting, I headed over to what I assumed to be an information board with multiple pieces of parchment stuck to it…

Well, shit. I can't read any of those strange letters.

Something is definitely written there, but I don't know what that is, which is strange since the Bandit's Intelligence Cards were written in kanji, so why are the letters here different? Is the Explorer's Guild special or were the Intelligence Cards special?

"Excuse me sir, is there a problem? Do you need assistance with anything?"

A soft voice called out to me from behind my back. When I turned around, I learned It belonged to a young girl who looked roughly the same age as me. She was a Lv2 Explorer and was dressed in the same receptionist outfit as the guy behind the counter.

"Uhm, yes. Actually, I'm sorry to bother you but I can't read any of those."

I said apologetically while pointing at the message board.

"Of course sir. If that's the case then I can read the information you want for 16 Nar."

I see. A substitute reader, huh? In a world in which the literacy rate is quite low and the ability to read is a privilege reserved mostly for those of noble birth who could afford to learn it, such an institution might actually be a quite lucrative business. And the price seemed to be pretty reasonable, but that is just my own opinion, that is to say a layman who doesn't know the actual value of this world's currency and the average hourly payment rate.

"Then please do so."

I took the backpack off my back and got the necessary amount of money out of the drawstring bag.

I wonder if 16 Nar is the standard price, or the one that has already been affected by my 30% discount skill? Because my intuition was telling me that the former was the case here.

“Please follow after me.”

She took the pieces of paper out of the board and we made our way to one of the tables. On the way, she passed the payment on to the receptionist dude. So I assume he’s responsible for handling all the money that comes from the transactions with the people who want to read the information despite not being able to read themselves? That might be wise from the guild’s perspective, but I hope that guy leaves all the money here when he finishes his shift. After all, if we assume that the Explorer’s Guild earns a lot from substitute reading alone, then the caretaker of said money would make a perfect target for a robbery.

Money, huh?

It pained me a little that I had to spend some money so soon after steeling myself to save as much of it as possible, but if it’s for the purpose of getting as much information about this world as I can, then I will take every little piece of info I can get my hands on, as long as it will lead me to making lots of money in no time.

On a totally unrelated side note, that girl is as pretty as Roxanne is, at least when we talk about facial features. If we’re talking about boobs, then hers were hidden under the uniform she was wearing, but at the very least the visible bulges confirmed that she was not as flat as a cutting board. But she was still inferior to Roxanne, who was an absolute bombshell all across the board!

“All right, I can translate as many things as you want, as long as it’ll be in the time it takes for the sand in this sand watch to finish falling. Is that alright with you?”

She then procured a small hourglass out of her pocket and showed it to me, probably so that I wouldn’t try to accuse her of cheating on time. But I feel like I should point out that even for a pocket hourglass, the midsection was surprisingly narrow. I wonder how much time it will take for the sand to fall from one section to the other? 5 minutes? 10 minutes? Maybe 15 at best? Either way, I should get this lady to read as many documents as she can for me. In other words, be as precise with your questions and demands as you can.

“Okay, I understand.”

“Then I presume we can start the countdown?”

“Yes, please do.”

She then placed the hourglass on the table and turned it upside down, beginning the sifting of the sand inside.

“So, what exactly do you want to know, Mr. Customer?”

She asked me. What I want to know is… wait, actually, I don’t even know what I want to know, because I have no idea what is written on those pieces of paper. I asked her to read them for me precisely because I wanted to know that! So I guess we’ll start with that and then branch out to the specifics.

“What is written in this document right here?”

“Those are the general information about the newly-discovered Labyrinth, The Labyrinth of Cooratar. The current exploration progress is 11 levels. The first level is inhabited primarily by Needlewoods, level 2 is the domain of Naïve Olives, the third one…”

I don’t get a single word of what she’s saying to me. Like, I hear those words, but none of them is clicking with me. All I know is that she’s probably talking about monsters prowling each level of the Labyrinth’s dungeon.

“What about the intel on the Labyrinth’s deepest depths?”

She takes all the papers and searches through them in order.

“Well… it looks like no one has reached the deepest level yet, therefore we don’t have any information on it yet. I’m sorry.”

After all that searching, all she had for me was a disappointing answer. But I kinda expected it, since the Labyrinth was apparently discovered only a few days ago. Of course no one would have reached all the way to its end in such a short amount of time.

“And the other papers? What are they about?”

“The ones over here contain the details of jobs for an Explorer.”

Another piece of knowledge which was imparted to me by Alan the Slave Merchant was that the Guilds generally did not offer quests and jobs to outsiders, and that they might find it difficult to recruit Party members, but he also said that the guilds are

always open for accepting new members into their ranks. But for the time being I would like to avoid making any decisions that may or may not have an impact on the rest of my days spent here. Before I commit myself to one guild or the other, I'll have to carefully consider all of the options available to me to ensure that I won't pick the worst possible one on the worst possible conditions. Kinda like with job hunting back on earth, but with more dire consequences.

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"What kind of jobs are there, exactly?"

"There are various kinds differing with specifics and difficulty level. Are you interested in anything in particular?"

"Not really, so if you could please start reading from the beginning…"

"Well then, first we have the services offered by the Knights of the Marquis of Negliva for those of 70 years of age or above, more details will be given when the candidates arrive in the Knight's headquarters. I believe that is one of the requests that are a part of the kingdom's elderly assistance initiative."

So they have one of those here, even though this is clearly a medieval setting? Okay I guess. All that I care about is that there is nothing about recruiting potential Party members. Besides, I wouldn't want my companions to be a group of old geezers who are one foot in the grave already.

"Next one please?"

"Goods carrying quest, commissioned by one of the warriors in service of Viscount Kustov. That is all."

"Hmm…"

I repeatedly looked over the upper and lower pieces of paper sprawled on the table. All of them probably relate to the same kind of quest, that is transportation or escorting jobs, because their characters in the headers that apparently represented them were repeating across all the posters, or at least that was my guess from observing the movements of the guild lady's hand as she moved her slender fingers from words to word, explaining their meaning to me. I think I have a firm grasp of

those two now, but the rest of the symbols were still a complete mystery to me.

As I was lost in my own thoughts, about six minutes have passed.

“I’m afraid the time is up. What do you want to do, sir? Shall I continue or do you want me to stop?”

The sand in the hourglass seemed to have fallen from top to bottom in its entirety. So this pocket one lasts for about six minutes, huh? Technically I could ask her to read some more of those posters for me for another six minutes, but that would mean I’d have to hand another 16 Nar to her, and since I don’t want to spend any more money than absolutely necessary, I think it would be best to call it quits here for now.

“We can stop here. Thank you for your assistance, ma’am, you’ve been very helpful.”

“I’m glad to hear it. Thank you for your patronage and have a pleasant day, sir.”

We shook each other’s hands and then I left the Explorer’s Guild. To be completely honest, this whole endeavor wasn’t helpful at all, except for maybe one thing: reaffirming my conviction that it would be more beneficial for me to actually learn the written language of this world. That way I wouldn’t have to bother with finding someone to read stuff for me all the time, and that would be a huge relief for my wallet, and who knows, maybe it would also improve the way others look at me.

Crossing one thing off of my to-do list, I headed towards the town center. My next priority was securing myself a place to stay, at least for the time being. To do that, I headed to the inn which Alan the Slave Merchant recommended to me. It was to the southwest, so just opposite of the knight’s guardhouse. Supposedly it was run by the Innkeepers guild, so it should be a place that should be both safe and secure, but a part of me was getting worried that due to such a convenient location the accommodation fee might be off the charts. However, that was one of the few matters where I absolutely couldn’t allow myself to be a scrooge. I have 33 gold coins on me and I won’t allow them to be stolen from me just because I chose some cheap, but shady place instead of something more reliable.

I entered the inn through the lightly colored, wooden door. One look at the place told me that it was just like Alan-san told me: kinda sloppy and definitely not cozy, but perfectly average for someone like me. It looked more like an interior of a restaurant than the lobby of a hotel. Curiously enough, almost all of the tables here were empty

and there was barely a soul to be seen. Right about now should be one of the busiest times of the day when places like that should be bustling with customers! Or maybe the concept of lunch does not exist in this world?

“Welcome!”

As I headed for the counter, a man standing behind it called out to me. He was a sturdy looking guy in his thirties, who was a Lv28 Innkeeper. Well, this shouldn’t come as a surprise. If there was such an organization as an Innkeeper’s Guild. He wore rough clothing which was somewhat similar to what I was wearing right now. Looks like the business really wasn’t booming to such a degree that he could afford to buy himself something fancier. But enough about that. Let’s talk business.

“How much would I have to pay for a longer stay?”

“You intend to go to the Labyrinth as well, young lad?”

How did he know that I was going to the Labyrinth? Was it just a lucky guess? Or perhaps more people like me came here with exactly the same intention? That was what I initially thought, until it occurred to me that he probably deduced that from the way I was dressed. I mean, if I was in his shoes and saw a young man dressed in a bandana, leather armor and two weapons on him, I would assume that he was a) crazy b) trying to rob me c) heading someplace dangerous. And the only such place around these parts is the newly-discovered Labyrinth, so yeah, it must have been a simple cause-effect deduction.

Since the Labyrinth is still brand-new, there might be a possibility of more people like me showing up, and once they do, it will be like an open hunting season, so I hope he still has some vacant rooms left. Please let that be the case!

“That’s right. That is my intention.”

“Hmpf, thought so. You look exactly like them adventurous folks who come to the big cities from the countryside to see what the world outside of their stuffy little villages has to offer and try to make a name for themselves. So what kind of room do you want then? A single? Or double? Or perhaps a shared quarter?”

“For now single room will be enough.”

A shared quarter? What’s that? Is it similar to those Japanese Edo period-styled hot-

spring inns where you can have as much as six people sleeping together in the same room? And here I thought that medieval worlds in games were based exclusively on European middle ages where something like that wasn't as common. What a nice cultural addition. Regrettably, I have to turn that option down, for security reasons. I have too many valuable items on me to risk them getting stolen. That is why I cannot allow myself to share a room with other guests.

"What about the furnishings? You want something that's a bit more on the fancier side?"

"Just your standard lodging will be fine. I don't mind if its furnishings are a little old."

"What about the meals? Of course I can't force you to eat here exclusively, but if you choose to have your meals together with the room, then I could offer you a discount, as per the policy of the Innkeepers Guild. And just between you and me, dining in this city can get pretty darn expensive, going as high as 100 Nar per meal, and since you came here for lodging then I guess you're not exactly sleeping on the moneybags, right? Then again, if you were really strapped for cash, you would have chosen something even cheaper."

So I have been branded as either a poor or stingy type of guy. But putting that matter aside, the Innkeeper makes a pretty solid point. What should I do about the meals I'm going to eat? I know that since I came here from the 21st century Japan I'm probably going to be heavily biased towards the food from this world, but what I had so far wasn't exactly what I would call terrible, so I think that given enough time I might be able to adjust my palette to it, even if it is many tiers below what I have been used to for my entire life.

"Fine then, hit me up with the meals as well."

If what this guy says turns out to be true, then finding a decent food place with affordable prices might be quite an ordeal. That's why having food waiting for me here at discounted prices might not be such a bad deal.

3

"Now, this is just a formality, but it's an order from the top brass of my Guild, so just bear with it for me, okay kiddo? Here, this is my Intelligence Card with the officially certified Innkeepers Guild's seal of approval."

And he practically shoved his Intelligence Card down my throat. It really must have contained all of his personal and business information, but since I can't read any of those words I can't know for sure.

"Ah, okay. Not that I didn't believe you, but it's nice to know that your Guild takes such small details into consideration."

"Really? You're the first one who actually thinks like that. Other customers, even some of my most loyal regulars just think of it as a bother."

No shit? But I can see why that would be the case. If Intelligence Cards can be said to be this world's equivalent of my old world's ID Cards that contain every little detail about a person then the owners of inns, shops and restaurants could definitely use them to keep shady customers out of their businesses by creating the list of the permanently banned ones and handing it over to the authorities. Kinda scary, futuristic concept, but as long as it gets the job done…

"By the way, are there any restrictions as to who might stay in this fine establishment?"

"As long as you are a law-abiding citizen you're free to stay here. The only ones whom I won't tolerate here are Bandits, Thieves and other scummy criminals. I take pride in the fact that for as long as I've been the owner here, none of them bloody outlaws set as much as a foot in here and I intend to keep it that way. Does that answer your question, boyo?"

"It does, thank you very much."

"Good. Anything else you wanna know?"

"Nah, I think I'm good for now."

It would seem that this place will accept anyone, be it a noble or a slave, as long as they are not lawbreakers.

"Speaking of Bandits, have you heard any rumors about their activity in the town or in its vicinity?"

"Not many of them, thank the Gods for that. But from what I do hear it seems that the activity of the Demi-human Brigands and Beastman Pirates began to be on the rise again. Not to mention the Robbers who commit brutal and atrocious acts on anyone

who happens to be unfortunate enough to cross paths with them. I have never seen one of them for myself mind you and I'm not going to complain about that. So to give you a short and precise answer, you'll definitely find them around here, but I wouldn't recommend looking for them unless you had no other choice. No matter who they are, criminals and outlaws are no good pieces of shit who should all be wiped out from the face of this earth!"

"I see. I'll be sure to take those words to heart."

Looks like he really has it out for Bandits and other criminals. Perhaps it would be best not to pursue the matter further. Instead, let's ask him about the actual cost of my staying here.

"How much would I have to pay for the lodging + meals combo, if you don't mind me asking?"

"Ah, that's right, I almost forgot about that! The cheapest single room costs 260 Nar and the cheapest meal set costs 60 Nar, so 320 Nar in total. If you intend to stay for longer, I can cut that price to 224 Nar per night. I always demand payment in advance, but you can pay for 1 day every day instead of paying for a week or a month."

320 Nar a day for accommodation and food, downed to 224 Nar after applying my 30 % discount. Good to know that it works in this particular case.

"That's a pretty sweet deal you have for me, and I'll gladly take it."

I took the backpack off my back and took the drawstring bag out of it.

"Thank you for your patronage then. The meals are served in this here dining hall. Breakfast is already included in the accommodation fee. We begin serving it 30 minutes after sunrise, sometimes a little earlier if there is a special occasion. Dinner is served starting from 30 minutes after the sunset, and will be served for 2-3 hours, so it will be in your best interest not to be late if you want to keep that stomach of yours full. As long as the lights in the canteen are on then you're safe, but if they are turned off then you either wait until breakfast or finding something on your own."

"Sounds reasonable enough."

That said, I placed 4 silver and 48 copper coins on the counter. If I knew exactly how long I would have to stay here then it might have been better to pay for more days in

advance, but with my current budget I would have risked losing all the money I have on me right now without any guarantee that I would be able to get those back. That is why I will pay for 1 day of stay on a day-to-day basis, starting from 2 days payment right now.

The Innkeeper counted the coins slowly.

“Payment for 2 days, got it. Now boy, raise your hand.”

“Okay.”

I did exactly as I was told.

“Investigate the will of the flowing spirit, the wisdom of intellect. Intelligence Card, open!”

I stretched my left hand with the newly-materialized Intelligence Card towards him. Showing him my Card sounded infinitely more convenient than filling the inn’s logbook while being unable to write the letter or read the words.

“Is this enough?”

“Yeah, absolutely. Kaga… Michio, huh?”

I know that the name on the Intelligence Card was written in the Japanese fashion, but I wasn’t sure if I should go out of my way to tell him that Kaga was my surname, not a given name.

“That’s my name alright.”

“And your Job is still a Villager I see. Well, do your best to get yourself some decent one as fast as possible.”

“I will be sure to do that.”

“Okay, that takes care of all the formalities. Now come on, I’ll show you to your room.”

And he left the counter. It looks like he does not intend to carry my backpack for me, so I have to do it myself.

“Right behind you, sir.”

I followed behind him through two flights of stairs. Looks like my room is placed on the third floor.

“If you really intend to go explore the Labyrinth, I can buy the ingredients you’ll find in there off of you, as long as it won’t be too large and it will be more than one piece of it so I can add it to the menu.”

“Roger that.”

If I’ll obtain some monster meat I might as well sell it to him, since he seems so eager about the idea.

“When you return here after the day of adventuring and you’d want some hot water to wipe your body, come see me about it. A whole basin of hot water costs 20 Nar by the way. Take it to your room with you after dinner and bring it back in the morning before breakfast. If you want to use the lamp, the rental fee is 10 Nar, and it contains about an hour’s worth of lamp oil. Feel free to add more oil yourself if you’ll need it, just don’t go starting any fires.”

“I will be careful not to do that.”

While we were talking about all those things we have reached our destination. The Innkeeper stood in front of the door as he was searching for the right key to the room, and then he placed it in the keyhole and opened the door.

“Here we are.”

“Hoo…”

It really was a single bedroom the size of about 10 tatami mats. The only furnishings were a small closet right next to the room’s entrance, a bed in the middle and a desk and a chair at the back. On the other side of the room was a medium-sized wooden window.

All in all, this room isn’t all that bad. It’s certainly better than the one at the Village Chief’s house, although I stayed in it for only one night and it was free of charge.

“The shelves under the closet can be locked and I reinforced them with special

shielding cement, but I would advise against putting any valuables in them anyway. If you have such items, you'd best keep them close to yourself at all times. The servants will come clean the room once a day. If you want your clothes to be washed, just negotiate the price with whoever will be in charge of cleaning at that time. When you'll be heading out, please leave your room key at the reception desk. The number of this room is 3-1."

He showed me the key and placed it on the closet.

"Alright. Thank you for all the information."

"Don't mention it. Now please enjoy your stay."

And he left the room, leaving me alone with my thoughts.

4

Finally being left alone in my new temporary base of operations, I sat on the bed to test it out. It wasn't particularly soft, but also wasn't as hard as I was initially expecting it to be. Overall, it was not bad, like a solid 5/10 or 6/10.

I lowered the backpack on the floor and took all of my luggage out of it. I think that my old jersey can be left here without any regrets. The Village Chief thought it was pretty valuable, but he couldn't have been more mistaken, so even if it was stolen from me, I wouldn't have been shedding many tears because of it. The same principle can be applied to the leather shoes which are currently on my feet. They were cheap as dirt, so even if I lose them I can buy myself another pair anytime.

Next I took off the Scimitar and Copper Sword in order to rearrange the way I was wearing them. Since I was training kendo from a young age I was more accustomed to fighting with a two-handed sword instead of a one-handed one, but I wasn't going to use Durandal in a fight unless I had absolutely no other choice. Since the Scimitar was a relatively light weapon, it would be best to place it at my waist.

Finishing my rearrangements, I placed the rest of my things in the closet and locked it, storing the key safely in my backpack. I did the same with the Bandit's Bandana since it was so light that adding it there made no difference to its weight. The last thing which ended up there were the two drawstring bags filled with my money.

Inspecting the key to the room, there was something written on it. Probably my room's number, but it was written in a rather peculiar fashion. The Intelligence Card contained Arabic numerals, but those were different from them. They were more reminiscent of the ones I saw on the posters back at the Explorer's Guild. Could it be that the letters they were using there are the standard, or "normal" letters used by the inhabitants of this world?

……

Okay, now that I got myself accommodated, I feel it is high time for me to go hit the Labyrinth. I will accomplish nothing by simply sitting around on my ass doing nothing. Yup, that sounds like the best course of action for now.

I got up, pulled the backpack back on my shoulders and left the room. Back at the lobby floor I just left the key on the counter in front of the Innkeeper who gave me a small nod and I left the inn and made my way towards the town gate which was facing the castle in the distance.

There were no gatekeepers at the gate, so I just crossed it without being bothered by anyone and made my way towards the nearby forest. According to the Slave Merchant's instructions, the Labyrinth itself should be nearby.

While I was passing by the wheat field, I noticed that a suspicious black wall suddenly appeared between the trees right in front of me. It's a good thing that I managed to stop myself right in my tracks, otherwise I would have surely bumped into it head-first and then who knows what might have happened? What the hell is this thing? Is this some kinda trap?

As I was thinking that, a group of six people before me approached it as if it was the most obvious thing to do. Is this some kinda transportation device? A teleporter, perhaps? That's amazing and cool in all sorts of ways! I want to give it a go immediately… But wait a second! Identify! Just like I suspected that Party has someone with the Job of a Wizard among their Ranks. A friggin Wizard!

"Here. This is the place."

"Umu."

All of them exchange a few sentences and the knight who I suppose is the Party's leader proceeds forward and enters the forest. Despite his fairly low level, he looks

like a pretty proud and self-important fellow. For now, maybe I should try following after them to see where they will go and what they are going to do.

Following after those guys (at a reasonable distance, of course) to the other side of the portal, I happened upon a small hill with the same kind of portal I passed through just now. Is that the entrance to the actual Labyrinth? I said that the portal was on a small hill, but to be honest, rather than a hill, it looks like just a sizeable mound of fresh soil. My guess is that this, let's call it entrance for now, is the only thing that's sticking above the ground level and that the dungeon itself is actually hidden underground.

Apparently, someone was waiting for the group at the entrance. Looks like an Explorer. When the Party I was following approached him, he began the conversation almost immediately.

"How far have you gotten?"

"The second level. I got out just now."

"What kind of monsters have you encountered?"

"Needle Woods on the first floor and Green Caterpillars on the second floor."

He gave them a short, methodical answer.

"Well, you heard him. So? What should we do?"

"I think we can handle the first level."

The knight presented his opinion. So he really must be the party's leader. The rest of his comrades nodded their heads and approached the black wall one by one, and then disappeared. So that really is the entrance.

Should I go in as well? Ah, but before that, I guess I should do another Character Reset. I opened the menu and got rid of the 30 % discount and replaced it with Bonus Weapon 6. Now I have 1 Bonus Point left, because the second one was used to get the ability to shorten the casting time of Skills and Spells, since using them in-battle was difficult enough as it is. Not casting them should be easier for me, even if only for just a little bit. I am lucky that such a Skill has been implemented into this game… I mean world. Upon closer investigation, that 1 Bonus Point should shorten the casting time of Skills and Spells for about 10%. I decided to place the last Bonus Point I had left into

Critical Strike Chance Increase. Just like with the reduction of the casting time, one Bonus Point seems to be equal to a 10% increase. If that is the case, then I wonder what is the maximum cap for such abilities? 30%? 50%?!00%? Or does it vary from Skill to Skill, depending on what it is and the method of its use?

With that out of the way, I closed the settings screen. Durandal is placed on my waist next to the Scimitar.

With the preparations done, I finally approached the entrance to the Labyrinth. I was half-expecting the Explorer who stayed near the entrance to comment on how I shouldn't be going into such a dangerous place when I'm clearly not ready, but he just ignored me and didn't even look my way. Okay, that works just fine for me I guess.

I tried going through the black wall myself. When I inserted my hand into the portal, it went through it without encountering any kind of resistance. Encouraged by it, I went there properly… and ended up in a room-like cave, or perhaps a cave-like room.

It was a small square space covering about 4-5 square meters. There wasn't any artificial source of light, but thankfully it wasn't so dark that I couldn't see my surroundings at all. The dim light emitted by the stone walls was enough to give me the vague idea of where I should go to proceed.

So this is a Labyrinth, huh?

5

Three roads were extending from this room: one in front of me, one to the left and one to the right. The black portal behind me served as an entrance to the Labyrinth, therefore it was of no interest to me for now, since I wasn't going to leave this place minutes after I entered it.

All of the roads looked exactly the same, that is a narrow tunnel about 3 meters wide and even more dimly lit than this starting area, so much so that seeing what's on the other side was practically impossible. In your typical RPG terms, I found myself on the crossroads, and quite the complicated ones at that.

Will I really be okay wandering around this place? After all, I didn't prepare any kind of mapping supplies. Moreover, I haven't even thought about buying myself some of those. The same goes for some portable sources of light, like torches or even that goddamn oil lamp from the Innkeeper. What am I going to do now if it turns out that the inside of the Labyrinth is all dark like a… I'll better stop talking now before I say something I'm going to regret. I mean, I didn't see those six players carrying any light sources with them either, but there is a possibility that their Wizard could create light with his magic. Alright, time to use my knowledge learned from video games in practice.

When it comes to mapping and navigating the labyrinths, the general rule of thumb is that you should always stick to one side of the passages you're going through or to always turn in one direction so that you could eventually come back to the place where you started the exploration even if you end up getting lost.

I chose to go down the path to the left. There was a fork at the end of it, and one of the available paths was turning left again. Both the floor and the walls are still solid and don't show any signs of crumbling down on my head or any traps launching themselves at me from out of nowhere.

Luckily for me, when I made another step, I noticed that every time my foot touched the ground beneath me, that portion of the floor shone with the same dim light emitted by the walls of this place. So it turns out I don't need an external source of light after all. Good to know. It's nice that this Labyrinth turns out to be quite a convenient place to explore. This way, I won't have to worry about being suddenly attacked from behind by monsters who dwell in here. And speaking of surprise attacks, after I went a few steps ahead, I heard the sound of something moving behind

my back. However, it was not an attack I was anticipating, ready to slash whatever tried to jump me with my right hand firmly on Durandal's hilt.

Looking back towards where I came from, the black wall shone with a pale blue light, revealing another group of people. They were a party of 5 Knights and 1 explorer. I thought they were going to head through one of the pathways leading out from the main area, but apparently their intention was the exact opposite, because they faced the stony entrance and then proceeded to head out of the Labyrinth, one after the other. So the entrance to the Labyrinth is at the same time its exit. Expected, but having a visual confirmation is always nice. Anyway, I should proceed further. I cannot allow myself to waste even a single minute if I am to make a ton of cash required to buy Roxanne.

One thing I wondered about though, was what I was going to do if a monster really attacked me in here. As I mentioned above, the passages were claustrophobically narrow and Durandal wasn't exactly a short sword or a dagger, so If I'm going to be attacked in those corridors, I will have no other option but to run towards some wider space if I ever want to defend myself. Only an idiot or a total noob would attempt to fight with a longsword while being confined in an enclosed space. If this was just a game dying wouldn't be much of a setback, since I'd just have to make the trip back here again from the nearest respawn point, but as long as I have no way of knowing if I only have one life here or not, I'm going to assume that death here is like the one while playing games on Death March difficulty: you die = no do-overs, just the cold emptiness of the void in the afterlife.

But before I worry more about that, a system message flashed before my eyes.

<New Job obtained: Explorer>

Now what do we have here? Better check it in the Job settings screen.

<Job: Explorer, Lv1>

<Active Effect: Slight increase to Physical Attack>

<Skills: Item Box Party Organization Dungeon Walker>

Oh would you look at that, just by going into the Labyrinth and walking around a little I have obtained the Explorer's Job! So you don't have to join a Guild to obtain a Job they represent after all! Neat!

So let's run a quick check, just to be sure. I have obtained a Thief Job after I have stolen a pair of sandals from the barn in the village, the Job of a Hero after I saved said village from a Bandit attack, and now a Job of an Explorer after entering the Labyrinth. What does that tell us? It tells us that you don't have to join a guild to get a Job, but you still need to complete an action that would act as a sort of "trigger" for obtaining it.

I tried changing it to be my first Job, but it proved impossible. The only two Jobs which could be set as my main one were Villager Lv3 and Thief Lv3, just like before. I can't place Hero or Explorer at the first slot. If that is how it's going to be, then I guess I have no choice but to continue going forward with Villager as my main Job. Even if it was kinda lame, it was still a better alternative than placing Thief as my first Job and becoming the target of society's scorn in this world as well. Can you imagine how epic of a fail would that be? It would literally be the biggest of all "Oof's", and to add salt to the wound, the one I would have brought upon myself with nothing but my own stupidity. As long as the First Job is considered your main one, the one that can be displayed on the Intelligence Card for all to see, it's best not to tinker around with it too much and just leave it at the default, safest option. Besides, it doesn't change the fact that my second Job was the Hero Lv1. The Skill of that Job was called Overwhelming. As to what that Skill actually does, I have no idea, since I didn't have any occasion to actually try it out, for the obvious reason.

The third Job I set was the newly-acquired Explorer Lv1. I think now's going to be a good time to test one of the Skills that came with it, the Item Box. Let's give it a shot.

"Item Bo…!"

Before I finished speaking those two words, something that looked like a small wooden box appeared in front of me. Or at the very least, something that looked like a lid of the wooden box. I tried to look at it from the side, but all I saw were the edges of the thin portal out of which the Item Box appeared. Did it arrive from the other dimension? Is it governed by some kinda space manipulation magic? But why did it appear like that even before I finished calling out the Skill's full name? Is it because of the Reduced Skills and Spells chanting time I invested my Bonus Point in? I thought it will only work on Spells and Skills with longer incantations, but it looks like it works on the shorter ones as well. I wonder if the effect would be the same if I just mentioned it in casual conversation? That would be quite a weakness, or perhaps even a bug. I would have to pay attention to it from now on, but for now I yeeted the Item Box from its portal to the meat and potatoes of the test that I wanted to carry out.

Okay, here goes nothing I guess.

I tried removing the Scimitar from my waist and putting it inside the Item Box. I had some concerns at first, but much to my relief it managed to get inside without any problems. Next I tried letting go of the box, and it disappeared, just like I expected. Then I called the Skill's name again, and the Item Box materialized itself in front of me one more time. I opened the lid and sure enough, the Scimitar which I placed inside not even a minute ago was there, waiting to be pulled out. Going by the video game logic, even if the sword was sizeable, it should only occupy one slot inside the Item Box. Hmm, I wonder if I can be like the protagonist of that one game… I think it was called Gothic? I remember that you could carry every item from the entire game in your backpack because its inventory space had no limit. Wouldn't it be nice if that was the case here as well? Yes it would.

6

If only the circumstances allowed me to, I would love to twiddle around with the Item Box some more to thoroughly test its capabilities, but my common sense was telling me that a Labyrinth, a foreign, uncharted ground was not a place for such frivolous behaviors. If I'm not careful, a monster might attack me the moment I let my guard down.

I let go of the Item Box, allowing it to slide back into the dimensional portal it popped out from, and then proceeded to checking out the rest of the Skills. I can leave the Party related one be for now, since I don't have an actual Party yet.

"Dungeon Walker!"

The best way I could probably describe this Skill was a navigation device which worked entirely in my head. Just like a professional GPS, it was asking me where I wanted to go, so I thought about the Labyrinth's entrance, the very first room I ended up in when I came through that black wall-portal. When I pictured that place in my mind, Dungeon Walker pointed me towards the right wall of the cave I was currently in. When I approached it somewhat reluctantly, it turned black, and the same pale blue pattern like before appeared on it. Could this be a shortcut to the starting area? Let's see for ourselves, shall we?

I walked through the wall, and sure enough, I ended up going back to where I started, a dimly lit cavern with a wall-portal serving as the doorway inside the Labyrinth. As

soon as I exited this newly formed doorway, it closed behind me and returned to being just an ordinary wall. I see, so that's how it works.

So to cut the long story short, Dungeon Walker will show me the shortest possible route to any place I have previously visited as long as I remember it and can picture it clearly in my head. I could be pretty useful on the surface as well, but I think that this Skill's usage is restricted only to the inside of the Labyrinth and other kind of Dungeons, hence the name Dungeon Walker. Category-wise, I wonder if it is closer to walking magic or perhaps map magic? Are such magics even exist in here? I don't know, so I just make those names up on the spot for my own convenience. And while we're still on the subject of walking around and wall-portals, I walked through the same one earlier, when I entered the forest outside of the Labyrinth after that one Party. What was up with that, exactly?

"Dungeon Walker."

I chanted the name of the Skill again after visualizing a portal at the edge of the forest in my head. The wall in front of me has indeed turned black and the symbol has appeared on it, but I wasn't able to go through it no matter how hard I tried. So it can point me to a place outside of the Labyrinth, but it won't allow me to use the passage to go there? Looks like I'd have to get a separate Skill if I wanted to use that kind of magic in the world outside of the dungeons. Kind of a bummer, but at least now I know that I won't have to worry about mapping the entire area and getting lost in here.

"Dungeon Walker."

I recast my Skill to go back to where I have come from and approach the newly formed black portal in the wall… but I couldn't go through it at all. Another failure? But why? I thought I did everything exactly as I should! A shortage of some kind? No, that can't be it, because the black portal appeared. Could it be that the places that I can go to are limited to the Labyrinth entrance or places with doorways? If that's the case, then I guess I have no choice but to walk back on my own without any assist.

On my way back through the corridors, I noticed that something was wandering behind me. It was a small monster that looked like a hybrid of a human with a plant. I was rather small and quite thin. I wonder if my current power will be enough to defeat it? I brandished Durandal from my waist, gripped it tightly with both my hands and rushed towards the monster.

“OVERWHELMING!!!”

スローラビットに近づいた俺は上段から魔物の肩口辺りに斬りつけた。
デュランダルが魔物をえぐり、肩からわき腹へと一刀のもとに切り裂く。
スローラビットはそのまま倒れ伏した。一撃だ。

I placed my whole battle spirit in that shout and swung my weapon down, slashing the monster downward from its left shoulder. It fell to the ground immediately and didn't stand back up.

Alright! Still managed to dispose of him with a single blow!

I must've looked pretty cool right now, right? I bet that if somebody saw my greatness just now, they'd want me to join their Party right then and there. If Overwhelming is so OP, then I might as well make it my personal secret ultimate technique. Heh, I can probably kill the strongest of monsters with such a move. As long as I have Durandal and the Hero's Job, I feel like I might be invincible! And who knows? Maybe once I'll find a way to actually level that Job up, maybe I'll gat my hands on even more powerful abilities… yeah right. That attack just now was not due to a Skill. It was a simple blow from Durandal. Overwhelming didn't activate at all. I shouted the Skill's name, but nothing happened and nothing's changed when I did so.

What the hell is wrong with this damn Skill? Is it useless? Bugged? Broken? No, I refuse to accept that that's it!

I used Identify on myself and checked that one bar under my HP which, as I assumed earlier showed the energy required to cast Spells and Skills, essentially my MP bar. Only ¼ of it remained. The rest was drained. 1/4th, huh? That's very low. That must also be the reason why Overwhelming failed to activate properly. I simply didn't have enough points left to use it. My first guess was that I still couldn't use the Skill, but I got it together with the Hero Job, so it should technically be possible for me to use that Skill even when the level of its corresponding Job was still just 1. *Sigh* this is my second failure at using a Skill in a span of like what, 15 minutes? Therefore not having enough energy was the only plausible explanation as to why I was unable to use it.

But then, what is at fault here? My excessive usage of Dungeon Walker? Yeah, that has to be it. I must've simply used it too many times which drained all of my energy down to such a pathetic level. But I was convinced that it was going to be more of a Passive Skill, the one which provides the user with benefits at all times without any actual cost of its usage! Was I wrong to think that? Does Dungeon Walker has to be activated at the cost of expending energy points, just like any other Active Skill? That must really be how it is. I mean, if you think about it carefully, there is no such thing as Passive Skills with active effects that can be turned on and off. Passive Skills are Passive Skills precisely because once acquired, they stay active all the time. But Active Skills, on the other hand, could have the additional, passive effects to them. So yeah, I think that

settles it. Dungeon Walker is actually an Active Skill with a passive effect, and that's the end of that story.

Anyway, the monster I have just defeated disappeared in a cloud of green smoke. After he was gone, the only thing remaining after him were the small branches, like the ones you often see on the trees in the spring. Identify told me that it was a Needlewood Branch, a drop item from the enemy I just killed, the Needlewood. Come to think of it, the Explorer Who talked to that Party I tailed did mention something about the first floor of the Labyrinth being taken by Needlewoods, and the second one was the domain of… Green Caterpillars, if I remember correctly. I tried putting the dropped branches into the Item Box, but for some reason they got rejected. Hey now, so you're telling me that putting a giant-ass Scimitar in there is okay but a few twigs are a no-go? *Groan* Okay, fine, if you're going to be so anal about it, then I'll just place the damn thing in my backpack. There, happy now? Great. Now that that's done, let's move to the next prey who's clearly aching to be slaughtered.

Along the way, I checked Durandal's Skills and saw that it also has a Skill called Absorption, meaning that with each enemy killed I should recover either a portion of my health or the energy necessary to cast other Skills. I have no way of knowing if I sis recover some health because that Needlewood earlier didn't even graze me, but it look like I did recover some energy. Maybe I should go and kill some more enemies just to confirm it? Yeah, that is what we're going to do.

The next Needlewood rushed me from afar and twisted its wooden body in an attempt to slam into me and slash me with its branches, but my own attack was still faster. Just like the one before him, he ended up being one-shotted, this time by a slash which followed from the right shoulder to its left side. It disappeared, dropped the items, I collected them and moved forward, prepared for quite a lot of grinding to be done.

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When I arrived at another wider cavern the only way I could choose was the one leading straight ahead. Right now I have ventured quite far to this floor's left side, but there is absolutely no cause for concern, since I can always use Dungeon Walker to go back to the starting point.

In the next four caverns I also had no choice but to go straight ahead, until I happened upon another enemy. I was hoping to get a surprise attack at it, but unfortunately the mechanic of the floor shining with every step gave my position away too early. It's not

that big of a problem, but I'll have to take that into consideration the next time I'll come to the bigger area. Also, it would be good if I could determine if the monsters in here move and hunt by relying primarily on their sight, or if they use other senses to determine the location of the potential prey. But that will come later. For now…

[Overwhelming!]

Since I should have enough MP recovered, I tried casting the Hero Job's Skill one more time. At first I thought that nothing has happened, just like last time. But this time something about the enemy has visibly changed. The Needlewood's movements became much slower, as if he was moving in slow motion. He was slowed to such a degree that I thought he was going to freeze in place any minute now.

In the meantime, I have approached it and positioned myself behind it. Due to the slow effect, it didn't even shift its head in my direction. For a second I thought about leaving it alone since there was no way that it would be able to hurt me in its current condition, but I discarded that thought almost immediately. This is a monster, and I am an Adventurer. This world operates on a very simple principal of [kill or be killed] where one wrong move equaled death. I didn't have to worry about it in my old world, but right now I have to keep telling myself that I am no longer an ordinary, powerless citizen. I am a warrior, and if I have the strength to fight, I might as well use it against anything which seeks to inflict harm upon me, no matter how defenseless it might seem! So sorry buddy, but I won't be risking letting you go so you could call the rest of your friends in an attempt to overwhelm me with your numbers!

I raised Durandal into the air and swung it down, cleaving the slowed Needle Wood before me in half.

There! How do you like that, you wooden dick?!

Based on my observations, I can tell that the slow effect lasts for some time, but I'll have to confirm if it is the same for every enemy who'll be slashed by Overwhelming, or does it differ from enemy to enemy.

I exhaled deeply and placed Durandal back at my waist as the monster, who probably didn't even realize what was going on until it was too late disappeared in a puff of green smoke. My own feelings have also calmed down sufficiently for me to analyze how exactly the effect of Overwhelm worked. Was it really slowing down whoever was cut by my weapon? Or was it actually accelerating my own movement speed, making

me see everything around me as moving extremely slowly? Or perhaps it's just increasing my Agility? Either way, to put it in the simplest way possible, it is a Skill which manipulates time. If it can really allow me to move faster than my enemies, than that is going to give me a tremendous advantage in battle. However, there is still one issue that I have to address.

The negative effect that the loss of MP has on my mental state.

After using Dungeon Walker too much, I have exhausted almost all of my MP, and as a result of that, my head was gradually being filled with gloomy, depressing thoughts which made me quite angry and irritated, and that anger and irritation reached their peak when I used Overwhelm to kill that Needle Wood whom I first wanted to spare. But after I slayed it and the MP recovery effect kicked in, I gradually started feeling better, as if something has chased away the dark clouds looming over my mind.

Does my mental well-being really have something to do with how filled my MP bar is? Because I remember that something like that has happened to me before, when I used the Skill of the Flame Rapier, only then I simply felt extremely mentally exhausted. So if we assume that expending MP worsens my psychological state and recovering MP improves it, then that would mean that the more Skills I use in battle, the wilder of an emotional roller coaster ride I'm going to go through.

Great, that is simply wonderful. Here I was, thinking that this adventure is going to be just like your regular RPG kind, but now I feel like I have just discovered the existence of a hidden Sanity statistic, just like in those Call of Cthulhu games. And that means that if I want to avoid the scenario in which I'm going to either go insane or so depressed that I'm going to kill myself for real this time. So until I'll be able to afford using Skills without having my MP drop to zero almost immediately, I think it would be best to avoid spamming them left and right unless the situation really calls for it.

Okay, after all these battles I think it's high time for another appraisal of my levels. I looked at my own hand and used Identify.

Kaga Michio (Male, 17 years old)

Villager Lv4 Hero Lv1 Explorer Lv1 Thief Lv3

Equipment: Durandal Leather Armor Sandals

The only Job whose level went up was the Villager. Hero and explorer stayed exactly

the same as they were.

Exactly how many Needle Woods have I defeated so far? I don't know the exact number, but it must be approaching a hundred, and yet even with the two of my Bonus Skills, 1/5th Experience Required and 5 x Experience Earned the only Job to gain a level was Villager? Just how many EXP does the Hero Job needs to level up?! And don't get me started about the Explorer, my newly acquired Job! Is obtaining levels for anything that isn't your main Job really that difficult?!

To begin with, I don't think that the actual level cap in this world is very high, probably because this is a reality, not a game that can be cleared in just a few days if you spend all of your time grinding and power-leveling. The denizens of this world can't do that, hence they have to amass experience gradually over the course of their entire lives, so it should come to me as no surprise that killing close to 100 monsters was still not enough for more than one Job to level up. Or maybe the Bonus Skills are not working as they should be working? Honestly, I don't even know anymore. Maybe by obtaining more Jobs the value got reduced to 1/3rd? Or perhaps the rest of the Jobs do get the EXP points, but not the entirety, but only a small portion of it? That would explain why did the Villager Job's level went up from 3 to 4, but the level of Hero and Explorer stayed the same.

Ugh, at times like these I would really like to have some kinda strategy guide with me. Or a cheat compendium.

Since my business with that monster is done, there's nothing left to do but to pack the branches he left behind and be on my way.

Or maybe I should do another Character Reset?

Since the Villager has leveled up, I should have one more Bonus Point. That is one thing which is totally praiseworthy: a system in which the total number of your Bonus Points increases as the level of your first assigned Job increases. With that said, I removed the Critical Strike Chance Increase and replaced it with Skill Cast Time Reduction. I feel like it might be of better use to me, because further down the line I will probably obtain much more MP, to the point where I will be able to spam Skills without running the risk of damaging my mentality, so it would be nice to have something that would allow me to fire those Skills off that much faster. As for the Critical Strike Chance, I think investing my Bonus Points into it might have been a mistake, because let's face it, with my current equipment I will probably never even

get the chance to use it in an actual combat since I one-shot every enemy that is stupid enough to face me, and even if I didn't do that, 10% Critical Strike Chance is still a pretty low number, so it can go fuck itself for all I care.

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The thing with having a strong weapon on you (and Durandal can certainly be classified as one such weapon or even going beyond, seeing how absurdly OP it is) is that if you can defeat everyone who dares to challenge you with one of two strikes, you will have absolutely no use of Critical Strikes, as they only serve to increase the damage done by weaker (normal) weapons beyond their usual capacity. In most games, the damage done from critical attacks varies between 100 – 250% of the damage dealt by the weapon you currently have equipped, so I'm sure that Durandal would have achieved truly absurd numbers, but that would only be a cosmetic touch. Against the current, low level enemies, the base damage done by it is perfectly enough for me to breeze through any challenge I might come across.

With my latest Character Reset, I've made sure to distribute my Bonus Points in such a way that I have none of them left. After getting rig of the Critical Strike Chance Increase I've put 2 Bonus Points in Skill Cast Time Reduction and 1 Bonus Point in Skill Cast Speed Increase. I wonder if just with those 3 Bonus Points alone I'll be able to achieve the highest possible reduction time and casting speed increase? It certainly would be nice, but let's not get our hopes up just yet.

For starters, I have to see with my own eyes how the current Cast Time Reduction and Cast Speed Increase will influence the usage of my Skills.

As a trial I decided to use the Item Box Skill, and when I called its name out loud, it appeared in my hands almost immediately. Great. Now we see that those Skills do actually contribute to my performance in a practical manner. I'm glad I decided to perform that Reset just now.

When I ventured forward, I battled even more Needlewoods. I know that one Explorer at the entrance mentioned that they are on the Labyrinth's first floor, but did he mean that the first floor consists only of Needle Woods? Because so far, I haven't seen any other monster besides them. Well, it's not like I have any problems with that fact, especially since my Durandal ensures that I one-shot them every time, granting me an easy win and a relatively safe passage through the corridors of this floor, but I'm just saying that some variety would be nice every once in a while, otherwise the process

of farming monsters and their drop items will get extremely repetitive and dull.

After plowing through hordes of enemies for a while, I decided to try wearing the Bandit's Bandana to see exactly how its effect is going to work. But in order to do that, I have to set the Thief as my first Job… But I cannot do that. No matter how many times I tapped the Thief Job in an attempt to set it as the primary Job, the game just wouldn't let me do that.

Why? What is going on here?! Why can't I do this now, when earlier both Villager Lv3 and Thief Lv3 could be set as the first Job without any issues?!

No, wait a damn minute, a thought just occurred to me.

Currently Villager is not Lv3, but Lv4.

Oh, so that's how it is? Then that would solve the mystery quite nicely.

Right now my Bonus Points are distributed as follows: 63 points in Bonus Weapon 6, 15 points in 1/5th EXP Required to Level Up, 15 points in 5 x EXP Earned, 3 points for the Third Job, 2 points for Skill Cast Time Reduction and 1 point for Skill Cast Speed Increase, Identify, Job Setting and Character Reset. A total of 102 Bonus Points, an increase by 3 points from the original 99 due to the Level Up of the Villager Job to Lv4.

However, that way I'd have to leave the Villager as the first Job, willingly discarding the option of switching it with the other Jobs that might provide me with better benefits.

Back when the Villager Job was still at Lv3, it was possible to switch it up with Thief Job, which was also Lv3. Because there was no change in the amount of the Bonus Points.

So what would happen if I tried a little something?

I performed another Character Reset where I discarded the Skill Cast Time Reduction and Cast Speed Increase and recovered the 3 points I've spend on them just a few minutes ago. Then I entered the Job Setting screen. If what I have in mind right now proves to be correct, then it might be possible for me to set the Hero Lv1 as my first Job.

Bonus Points are a wonderful addition that can be obtained by leveling up the first Job you have selected, but once they have been used up, the level of the Job set as the first

one cannot be reduced to its earlier value. The increase is permanent. That much should be obvious. But now with the adjustments I've just made…

I was able to set the Thief as my first Job!

Now that I was finally able to do that, I can test the Bandit Bandana at last. If I remember correctly, it is supposed to increase its wearer's physical capabilities. When I placed it on my head I did had a feeling as if my body became somewhat lighter, but tat might as well be my imagination. I don't understand it very well so that's the best way I can describe the feeling that has enveloped me.

It looks like this world is unlike the video games I have played thus far. Normally you'd be able to see the effects of the positive changed to your status immediately, but that does not seem to be the case here, even after increasing your level. All I have in regards to whether or not the Bandit's Bandana's effect has worked or not is my gut feeling alone. I would have gladly tested it out on one of the Needle Woods roaming the Labyrinth's halls, but since I'm killing them to death like One Punch Man (but like, with a sword, so… One Slash Man?) it wouldn't prove anything, and I don't want to fight with anything else than Durandal right now. Even though I wouldn't have to use the Copper Sword since I have a Scimitar with me, I feel like it would be only slightly better than its copper counterpart, directly impacting the time it would take me to defeat monsters in here, and since I am strapped for time, I cannot allow myself to experiment.

Finishing my little Job switching test, I took off the Bandana and reverted my character settings to the previous ones. It would be very bad if someone happened to see me wearing it, even by accident. The last thing I need right now is the spreading of the news that I have a Job that allows me to wear clothing that is exclusive to criminals.

I don't know exactly how much time I have spent hunting in here so far, but I feel like it must have been around an hour or so. Technically that much should have been enough for my first bout into such an unknown ground, but a part of me was telling me that I can still keep going. But this is my first time in the Labyrinth, so maybe calling it quits for today is actually a smart thing to do? On the other hand though, I don't feel tired at all yet, and my mental fatigue was also holding up nicely because of that self-restraint on Skill usage I placed upon myself.

Yeah, let's keep going just a little bit more.

No matter how far or deep I will delve into the depths of this dungeon, I can always use Dungeon Walker to get myself right back to the entrance point by going through the shortest route possible. As long as I'll have MP to cast that, there's no way for me to get truly lost in here.

Throughout the next hour, I fought around twenty more Needlewoods, which always came at me one at a time. Of course, I have spent most of that hour by going around the narrow corridors and the small caves they were leading into. Unlike in the video games, the real life didn't possess a random enemy encounters system that would allow me to fight a battle after battle in a span of seconds, which was quite regretful, because I'll admit that it would be nice if I could maximize the amount of battles and drop from enemies as much as possible without having to waist too much time on actually finding them.

Although all I needed to slay Needlewoods was one blow from Durandal, the procedure of defeating them, gathering the drop items and placing them back in my backpack still too a considerable amount of time. That is a chore to be sure, but at least my life is not threatened. The Villager's level did not increase further, but both Explorer and Hero both got up to Lv2.

And that's what I call fucking progress!

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By doing another Character Reset I got rid of Durandal. Then I opened the Item Box and took the Scimitar out of it.

Hmm? What's this?

When I took the Scimitar out of the Item Box, I noticed that it freed some space right next to it. I think it means that I can place some additional items there. Kinda tricky and unintuitive, but I can work with that.

I got some of the dropped branches from the backpack and tried putting them into the newly-freed space of the Item Box. Looks like one space slot can be taken by two branches simultaneously. It was exactly the same for the slot right next to it: exactly two branches could be placed there. So I guess that means that a single space slot in the Item Box can be occupied by different amount of items, depending on their size, and quite possibly weight?

I tried to do another thing next. I tried to place some branches into the space that was already occupied by one Scimitar, but I couldn't do it, but two branches could still fit into the space right next to it. I'm pretty sure that this space was not there before. But now that I think about it, it might also be related to the level of my Explorer Job. Maybe when its level will go up, then the number of spaces in my Item Box will increase accordingly?

When I just got this Job, meaning it was at its base, level, Level 1, I only had one space in the Item Box that could only hold one item in it, but now that the Explorer Job gained a level, I have obtained an additional item slot and could not hold up to two pieces of the same item in one slot. That's why I should now be able to hold both of my Scimitars in a single item slot. I guess I could test that further when I will elevate Explorer's Job level to Lv3. If my assumption is correct, I then I should get a third item slot and be able to hold up to three items of the same kind in one slot.

But for the time being, I placed the Scimitar back onto my waist and made my way back to the Labyrinth's entrance and passed through the black wall-doorway back to the outside world, and then headed back to the town of Veil.

When I got out of the forest, I noticed that the sun's position had changed drastically. I thought I was in there for only about an hour or so, but it looks like much more time have passed. It was probably due to my cautious approach since it was my first time in a place like this and I thought that it would be best not to go in too deep. But if I am to make all the money I'll need to buy Roxanne, then I'll have to cast that overly cautious attitude aside in favor of a more aggressive, gain-oriented approach. I only have so many days left until the deadline, so I need to pick up my pace from tomorrow onward.

Even though the day was slowly moving towards the night hours, the city was still booming with activity. As I was making my way towards the town's center, I took my time to browse through various shops and stalls (and ogled the nice looking shopkeeper ladies while I was at it).

Before returning to the inn and calling it a day I decided to pay a quick visit to the Adventurer's Guild, the other place that Alan the Slave Merchant has told me about.

The building itself was one story larger than the one belonging to the Explorer's Guild. At first glance, it looked like a really big post office, the kind that you'd see in larger cities. There were about five or six people inside, not including the receptionist-

looking staff members behind the counters by the walls. Huh, when I look at it like that, I realized that this place has much in common with the Explorer's Guild, even though the two were not exactly on good terms. Was it a conscious choice, or perhaps all of the public service buildings were build like that?

[Uhm, excuse me? I would like to sell some items from the Labyrinth, if it's not a problem of course.]

I reset my character to get the 30 % better selling price and then I stood in front of one of the counters. Since this is my first time selling anything to the Adventurer's Guild, I guess the actual amount of money I'm going to get is not all that important, but it's always better to get more money rather than less and then regret it. That and I'll get to see for myself whether or not they are going to try and swindle me out (which was rather improbable, but I'll have to be ready for everything).

I was expecting an older dude to be behind the counter, just like it was with Picker-san back at the village, but instead the one who was going to handle my inquiry was a nice-looking onee-san with an above average face. She looked much better than most of the village women but was still inferior to Roxanne in my opinion.

[By all means. Please place your items here on the counter.]

She gestured me with her hand and a big friendly smile on her face.

[Here you go.]

I placed my backpack on the ground beside my legs, took all the items that dropped from the monsters I have slain today and placed them on the counter. The spoils from my first-ever excursion to the Labyrinth were 21 Needlewood Branches. Even though I killed more enemies than that, only twenty one of the actually left something behind them when they died. I guess this must be another game-like aspect of this world: a chance of obtaining a Drop Item from a monster when it is slain. On a side note, I wonder is the items here have various degrees of rarity just like in all the RPG games that I've played. If so, then the degrees would probably be Common, Uncommon, Rare and Vary Rare, and the ones belonging to a Very Rare category would sell for much more than those from the Common one. Hehe, it would be nice if those branches were actually worth a ton; that would make achieving my current objective so much easier. But I guess we'll have to wait and see what this nice onee-san has to say about it.

[Understood. Please wait here for a bit while I will go and check the exact price for your items.]

She placed all the branches in a small trey and then withdrawn to a room in the back of the building. She's probably going to examine all the branches to confirm how much they are worth.

Since I had no choice but to wait, I decided to take a look around the guild building. As I was taxing everything with my eyes, I saw that one section of the wall to my left suddenly went all black, and that people emerged out of that newly-formed dark space.

Wait a minute… that looks like a wall-entrance to the Labyrinth! Then… is that Dungeon Walker?! But I thought that it can only be used inside of a dungeon! The ones who emerged from it were two Adventurer-looking dudes. There were no Explorers with them.

[Attention please! Anyone here interested in a one-way trip to Tahera?]

The first Adventurer to who emerged out of the wall asked that question in a loud, lively voice. When se saw that apparently no one was interested in his offer he chanted something in a quiet voice, created another black gateway on the wall and disappeared inside it.

Well, that sure was random as hell.

Putting that aside, if that Skill wasn't Dungeon Walker, then it must have been Field Walker, a Skill that works similar to Dungeon Walker, but outside of Labyrinths and Dungeons. Or at least that was my assumption. I mean, it would be very logical, right? If Dungeon walker can be used to create passages and shortcuts in and out of the Labyrinth just like that Party did before me, then Field Walker must be used like a method of fast travel between various towns and cities. In that case, those two must have been heading to another city called Tahera. But if that was their goal, then why did they stop here? Did they just drop in to say hi? Also, I wonder if that skill is Job restricted. Would I need to become an Adventurer first in order to use it?

As I was contemplating that, another portal has appeared in the exact same spot as before, and a group of Adventurers came out of it. Without talking to or greeting anyone, they left the guild as soon as they appeared.

Yup… that was definitely a series of events that happened.

…Jesus Christ, how much longer will I have to wait?!

[Thank you for your patience. Here are your money.]

Onee-san who took my items finally came back to the counter, so I turned my head back towards her. Now let's see, how much money did those branches got… me?

Huh?

On a small plate before me, there were two silver coins and a lot of copper ones. When I counted it, the exact number was 73.

73 coins. That is how much my hard work was worth.

Is that a fucking joke?

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Okay, alright, time for some quick math to figure this bullshit out. I sold 21 Needlewood branches to this fine lady here, and got 273 Nar in return. That would mean that a single branch went for as little as 13 Nar! And that's the price after it was already boosted with the 30% price boost, so normally one branch was only worth 10 Nar!

That price is so laughable that it makes me want to cry bloody tears!

I thought that I was in the Labyrinth for only an hour, but given how tilted the sun's position in the sky was when I got out, it might have actually been two hours. Now, for the sake of my big brain calculations let's assume that it takes an hour to kill ten enemies, two hours to kill twenty enemies and so on, all the way up to one hundred enemies in ten hours, and that a single enemy defeated was worth 10 Nar. That would result in a profit of 1000 Nar in ten hours.

With that, my initial goal of earning two gold coins per day would remain nothing but a distant dream. And even if I somehow managed to double that amount, it would still be a far cry from the 20 000 a day that would allow me to get enough funds to buy Roxanne without any issues. With that said, the obvious solutions would be to either spend more time in the Labyrinth's upper floors each day, or to venture deeper inside

in hopes of getting my hands on something that would allow me to get more money. Yeah, those are the only viable options I can think of at the current moment.

[By the way, can you tell me the exact requirements for joining the Adventurer's Guild?] [Of course. Truth to be told, becoming an Adventurer is relatively simple. All you have to do is to have an Explorer Job and have it at lv.50. If you are interested in joining, then do you want me to show you to the person who's in charge of the whole procedure?] [Thank you, but that won't be necessary for now.]

After respectfully declining, I collected my backpack and headed out of the Adventurer's Guild.

So basically what I learned from my short visit there is that Adventurer is an Explorer's senior Job and in order to acquire it, you have to make so many explorations to advance the Job to a ridiculous level, but the lady in the guild failed to mention if actually joining the guild was one of the requirements as well. Maybe it won't be necessary, or maybe it will. If at all possible, I would like not to join it carelessly, seeing as joining a guild apparently forces you to buy, sell and in general do business with that guild only, which can prove to be bothersome in the long run.

The slave merchant told me that the Explorer's Guild and the Adventurer's Guild do not like each other very much, and now I can say that I totally see why it is like that. In order to become an Adventurer you had to be an Explorer first, so it wouldn't be an understatement to say that joining the Explorer's Guild was nothing more but a stepping stone on one's way to become an Adventurer. Thinking about it, that is more than a little messed up and unfair, but it looks like that is how things are rolling here, so unless people won't change their way of viewing the Explorer's Guild, I guess nothing will really change in the way they are treated.

For the time being, I decided to us the money I got from today's expedition to buy myself some basic clothing, like socks, pants, an alternate set of shirts and pants, and a cloak.

The pants that I bought are the so-called pumpkin pants, the kind where the waist and both legs are tied together with a string. Along with the rest of the cloths that I bought, they are all used instead of brand-new, because that was a cheaper option. I'm glad that something as convenient as second-hand shops is also present in this world. This is going to make my life that much easier, at least when it comes to buying clothes.

When it comes to the cloak, I settled for a dark one with a face-covering hood. Edgy, I

know, but what can you do? It looked really cool so I just bought it without a second thought. Both mornings and evenings here tend to be a little bit on a cold side, so wearing a coat to mitigate that wasn't anything unusual. Quite a lot of people seem to be wearing them, in fact. Also, with that cloak, I will be able to wear my Bandit Bandana without anyone seeing it and raising suspicion as a result. In other words, a perfectly legit camouflage.

With nothing else to do, I have returned to the inn, and sure enough, the Innkeeper was behind the counter, just like when I left the inn to go to the Labyrinth.

[Yo, welcome back, kid!]

Yup, the atmosphere of this place was totally off-putting, but I guess there was no point in complaining if I wanted to keep my place to sleep for now.

[Can I get my key?] [Sure you can. Here.]

And he handed me the key to my room.

I quickly got up to the third floor, left my baggage in the room and got back down to the reception.

[You serving dinner yet?] [Yes, you're right on time. Go grab yourself a menu at the entrance to the dining area.] [Also, when I'll finish eating, I'd like to ask you for some hot wa…] [That will be 20 Nar, thank you very much.] [……]

I swear to God, this guy… but wait a minute. 20 Nar? What about my 30% discount?! Why does it not apply here?! Well, it's certainly a bummer that it does not seem to be effective since I'd like to cut my spendings as much as possible, but that much I can deal with. I took 20 Nar from my pocket and left it on the counter.

When I entered the dining area, the first things I saw was a table with four sets of dishes on it and a nice, friendly looking young woman next to it.

[Welcome, please, feel free to choose you diner for today from the following dishes.]

Is this lady in charge of the dining area (or maybe I should start calling it cafeteria for short)? The aura around her was totally different than that of the Innkeeper when she opened her arms and invited me further. Taking a quick glance at her with Identify, she was a 28 years old Female Innworker.

Even though this was supposedly the menu, it was different from the ones that I am used to. Looks like this one here is actually a system that allows you to select a real deal right from the get-go instead of picking a dish from the list and waiting for it to be prepared. If I were a betting men then I'd bet my money on the fact that this was a countermeasure against those customers who couldn't read at all. With such a system in place, even those who are illiterate can pick a dish without any complications, allowing for a continuous stream of customers. I have to admit, whoever thought about such a solution, that was a really smart move. Then again, there was something written on a piece of paper that was placed on the table I was guided towards. It must be a reservation that was prepared for me before I arrived, because it was a number, the same one that was engraved on the plaque that was attached to the key to my room.

Now let's see here… hmm, out of all the dishes, the rightmost one struck me as the most delicious-looking.

[I'll be taking this one.] [Understood. And what would you like to drink?] [What choices do I have?] [We serve beer, wine and herbal tea. You can also order Slime Liquor, but that you'll have to pay extra for that one.] [Then I'll be having herbal tea.] [As you wish. Now, please sit down and wait a minute while I'll go get your order.]

I had a little taste of the alcohol some years back, but I don't know how much of it I could tolerate without getting drunk off my ass, so it'd be better not to touch any of it for now. I have too much money on me to lose it all carelessly if I were to go on a drunken rampage.

When I took my seat at the table, my food was delivered to me literally minutes after. It was a stew with boiled meat and vegetables. The amount is… well shiver me timbers, but there is a crapload of it! Is it because they only serve two meals a day here? Because if that is the case, then I have absolutely nothing against such a policy. The more on my plate for me to eat, the better!

Well, without further ado, time to dig in!

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[……!!!]

Oh… my… LORD ALMIGHTY!!!!!

The bread was soft and tender, and both the stew and the vegetables and meat (probably beef) were equally taste buds-blowing, and seasoned just right with spices, out of which pepper was the one with the strongest taste. It might be just my personal opinion, but you could definitely make a fortune with this dish if you started selling it in Japan. Sure, it is a bit pricey, but something like that could definitely be sold as a high level gourmet dish back in my old world!

I took my sweet time to enjoy this meal and then went back to my room. The rays of the setting sun coming in through the wooden window painted it with a slight shade of red. After literally a few minutes since I got here, I heard someone knocking at the door.

[Please come in!] [Excuse me. I brought the hot water you requested.]

A man whom I have never seen before came into my room, carrying a tub filled with hot water with him. He placed it in the middle of the room and then put a towel next to it, immediately leaving the moment he finished doing his work. I thought about giving him a small tip for all the trouble he had to go through to bring it all the way to the third floor, but it looks like there was no need for me to do that.

I took off my clothes and wiped my body with the towel dipped in hot water. It was understandable that the Village Chief's house did not have any bathing facilities, but if an inn like that does not have them as well, then I guess bathing might not be all that popular in this world? Maybe it's just a luxury that only the filthy rich people can afford? This tub of water here cost me 20 Nar, so it was definitely not on the cheap side. But if I just neglected my personal hygiene and just kept on getting all dirty and sweaty without a care in the world the I'd be no different from an animal.

After getting myself clean, it was time to wash the clothes I was wearing as well. Unfortunately I do not have any soap on me, so all I could really do was to douse them in hot water and hang them out to dry. Besides, I don't even know if one of the shops in town is even selling soap, or does it even exist in this world in the first place. Before I always took things like soap od cleaning detergent for granted, but now that I won't have access to them anymore, I guess it will require some intense getting used to. The same goes for toothbrush and toothpaste. I think this world is still not technologically advanced enough to have those available. Also, when it comes to buying food, I could really, and I mean really use some convenience store right now. I'm afraid that if I want to continue eating quality meals like the one I've eaten today then that's going to get pretty darn expensive in the long run.

Since it will take some time for my clothes to dry I put on the pumpkin pants and one of the spare shirts I bought today. The pants didn't have any kind of string or a rubber in them so I couldn't adjust them, but that was only a slight inconvenience. Now that I finally had some time for myself I could feel the fatigue of the entire day catching up to me, so I just laid down on the bed and drifted off to sleep in a matter of minutes.

I must have gotten at least a few good hours of rest, but when I have woken up, it was still dark outside, so I just laid still on the hard hay-mattress, surrounded on all sides by pitch-black darkness. I think I was dreaming. About Roxanne. I couldn't recall what I was dreaming about exactly, but judging by the fact that my pants were still as clean as they were a few hours ago, at the very least I could be sure that it wasn't "that" kinda dream. It's funny though. It's been a few days since I arrived in this world, and I have never once dreamt of Japan. Not even a single dream to remind me of my home world and the life I've led there (as shitty as it was). Maybe that's because instead of longing for something that I will probably never see again, my brain has already switched its gears into thinking about the things that are withing my reach, just waiting for me to grasp them firmly with my hands?

Heh, who would have guessed that there will come a time when someone like me, who was considered to be a failure and a sore loser by anyone around him will have a real chance at snagging a real 11/10 beauty for myself (putting aside the fact that she is going to become my slave)? When compared to the girls in my old world, she is a million times better, there's no doubt in my mind about that! Not to mention that she is nothing like all those cutting board-like bitches that would report you to the police for sexual harassment the moment you'd dare to point that fact out to them! I can still see it so clearly, that image that has burned itself in my mind. Oh how her lovely melons jiggled up and down when she handed me that tea cup!!! Oh man, and now my horny mind is going on a rampage again, even though I have yet to obtain her as my own!

Initially I was afraid that I will always be alone in this new and strange world, but if I get her to be my companion, I'm sure she'll be able to teach me everything that I'll need to know not to stand out like a sore thumb. That is my current objective, and I absolutely cannot allow myself to fail at it. If there is anyone whom I could rely on, I'm sure it would be her.

After that I must have dozed off for some more, because when I opened my eyes again, the room wasn't as dark as it was the last time. I exhaled heavily. Even though I've gone to bed relatively early last night (maybe it was around 7:00 pm, I can't really tell

because there are no watches or clocks here), my limbs still felt kinda sore and I was still tired. That is probably because in order to get to Veil I have woken up pretty dang early and left the Village Chief's house and the village before sunrise, and then had a day full of surprising and taxing activities, both mentally and physically.

This world has one major drawback: the lack of electricity and technology makes it so that there is pretty much nothing to do after dark, aside form the adult entertainment such as brothels, drinking and gambling. No gaming console, no TV, no PC, no internet, no manga, no books, no nothing! If all I can do is to just lay in here and bore myself to death, then maybe I should go out and collect more information form the bar or something like that? Yeah, that would be a pretty swell idea, if not for the fact that it probably wouldn't go very well for me. As a kid who was constantly bullied, my communication skills were at the level where I normally wouldn't be able to hold a normal conversation with others out of fear that they also might start picking on me. What about the last two days you ask? Ah right, I guess I was able to somehow get by myself just fine, but I think that is entirely because I'm still treating most of the people here as nothing but game NPC's despite my best efforts to convince myself to switch that mentality into treating them like the proper human beings. You know how it is, right? In games, normal NPC's won't ever attack or turn on you, the player, unless they are scripted to do so or you provoke them yourself. As long as you won't do that, they will continue to behave in a neutral manner and spew exposition and quest info your way all day long without batting an eye. At least that's how I thought it will be here, but if any of those people outside are just as unpredictable as real people now, there's no telling when some of them might get offended or triggered by something I say and pull a knife on me. And that brings me to my second concern. The money I have on me right now. With the amount I have on me right now, wandering around without any legitimate reason might not be a good idea.

One gold coin will allow me to stay at an inn for around a month, so 33 of them would allow me to have a place to stay for three years. Even back in Japan, no one would be parading around with that much money on them, much less go get themselves piss-drunk at a bar, so I'm not going to do that either. I'm going to be a better man and rise above!

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Thirdly, I have no clue as to how much alcohol I could drink without getting shitfaced. I know that I am still technically a minor so I absolutely shouldn't drink even a drop of it… but that was before I was transported here. As far as I know, this world does not

have any limits how old you should be before you're allowed to drink, so one of these days I might as well give it a go to see why is everybody so gung-ho about it. Besides, getting information at the bars is always much easier when the other party you want to extract information from gets drunk sooner than you, so learning my limits will be to my benefit. I just have to wait with it until I won't have so much money on me. And there's no telling how much of a blabbermouth I might become when the good stuff starts getting into my head. Just imagine, a young lad screaming some drunken nonsense about Earth, Japan and all the things the denizens of this world haven't even heard off while swinging his beer mug around with a beet-red face. Yeah, I'm sure that a spectacle like that would guarantee me a nice round of questioning at the guardhouse at the very least.

On the other hand, all those alcohol-related musings of mine are base don the assumption that I am the same as I was back in Japan, while that might not be the case at all! Who knows, maybe after I was brought here my physicality and metabolism have been altered to adapt to my new reality, so maybe I could actually drink a small waterfall without its side effects kicking in? Or maybe the alcohol in here is pretty weak in comparison to the one served on earth? Be that as it may, as long as I don't have any way to turn all those question marks into solid evidence, the wisest course of action would be to avoid any and all alcohol altogether.

Fourthly, all I need for now is the information on how I can make money quickly and effortlessly. Every other information, such as what is considered common sense in this world and the general laws that govern it I can ask Roxanne about once I will finally make her mine.

If I went to a random bar right now, I wonder if I'd have been able to hear some nice, juicy stories? If not, I could just sit around and try listening to the conversations of others. That way, maybe I could pick a thing or two in the art of weaving ridiculous stories and honey traps meant to trick others? Then again, that would probably require me to have one hell of a silver tongue and a deep understanding of how this world works. Without those two, someone like me, an outsider without an ounce of common sense on him would just make a perfect sitting duck of myself.

Ehh, in the end, information gathering looks like its going to be more butthurting trouble then it's worth. Maybe I should just quietly go back to sleep again?

It was just a precaution, but last night I've slept with a Scimitar under my pillow in case someone tried to break in and rob me of my belongings. Maybe it's just me being

overly paranoid again, but I also have to admit that doing so made me feel like one of those samurais from old historical dramas who even took their katanas to bed with them because they needed to be combat-ready at all times.

Now that I was completely awake, there was no way I'd be able to fall asleep again, so I might as well get up, even if the outside is still pitch black. Unfortunately for me, the rooms in this inn didn't come equipped with their own toilets, so in order to use one, I had no choice but to go out of my room. After finishing my business there, I decided to go down to the lobby. The corridors and the stairs were all lit wit candles placed in regular intervals, making the inside of the inn lit just enough to avoid tripping over your own feet.

"You headin' off to the Labyrinth?"

When I got down to the inn's ground floor, I heard a voice talking to me from behind.

"Uwah!"

That scared the living hell out of me! I legitimately thought I was going to have a heart attack there for a second! Taking a look behind me, the one to call out to me so suddenly was the Lv. 28 Innkeeper.

"If you do want to head out there now, just mark my words and be careful, ya hear me?"

"So I'm not breaking any rules by going to the Labyrinth at night?"

"Of course not. Truth to be told, many Adventurers choose to go to the Labyrinths during the night hours. That might not be the case here yet since the Labyrinth has been discovered only recently, but normally that's what you'd do if you want to avoid stumbling upon too much traffic during the day."

I see. That certainly makes a lot of sense. Inside the Labyrinth, the concept of night and day does not apply. Many people were going into them at night, taking advantage of the fact that the inns for Adventurers were open practically 24/7.

"Isn't it hard on you? Having to be at the front counter here at all times I mean?"

"Not really. You see, I am one of the Emaro. I guess you can say that we are kinda special, because we don't require as much sleep as normal humans to maintain the

proper functioning of our bodies. Explaining it to everyone who asks about that is kind of a pain in the ass, so let's just say that I require very little sleep a day and just leave it at that, alright, kid?"

"Sure, but that sounds pretty rough."

That has to have something to do with how the brains of those Emaro fellows function. I remember that some animals on earth are like that too. Dolphins, for example. It is said that the left and right halves of their brains take turns sleeping, because if both of them fell asleep at the same time, they would straight-up drown.

"That's why I said that it'd be best to just leave it as it is. You get it?"

"I'm not that bright of a person so I might not be able to grasp the finer details, but I think I understood the gist of what you wanted to say."

"You don't say? That's gotta be the first time a human has dropped the subject when I asked them to."

The Innkeeper seemed to be happy with me not being too pushy regarding his race. Can't say that I blame him for being fed up with questions, but I don't think that many people in this world would know that a brains has left and right halves and how each of them works, so that oof cannot be assigned to them entirely, but still… if someone does not want to delve too deeply into any given subject, you shouldn't grill them about it against their will. Only total douchebags do that.

On a side note, following my dolphin digression, I wonder if Emaro have something to do with the creatures of the ocean, like mermaids, or should I say merfolk?

Glance~~~~

Nope, he has a pair of two perfectly normal-looking legs.

"I'm glad to hear that."

"And that is why I'm going to do you a solid and willingly talk about some things, so be sure to listen carefully because I'm only going to say this once. Emaro people hate settling and being tied down in one place for too long, and that's why most of us will chose to become Innkeepers and work in the establishments run properly by the Guilds. I guess you can call it our race-specific Job. Since we can always be ordered to

transfer to another place if need be, this is a perfect Job for us."

"It would really seem so."

Maybe his race really did evolve from some seabound species if the very concept of settlement appears unattractive to them. Anyways, I left the key to my room at the reception desk after I briefly went back upstairs to get my backpack and prepared myself for another round of money-hunting in the Labyrinth. If I am to just sit around doing nothing, then I might use that time to do something productive.

"Hey kid, maybe you should consider taking a lantern with you, huh?!"

"It's okay, I think I'll manage without one just fine!"

I left the Inn, shouting that to the Innkeeper. I mean really, what's a little darkness going do? I'll be fine.

Except I wasn't.

It was so dark that to say that I wasn't able to see shit was an understatement of the century!

"Oh fuck me!"

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It's really, really dark outside, to the point where I can't even see one meter ahead of me. Why is it so dark in here? Is there no moon in this world at all, or is it that it is being covered by the clouds or something? When I looked into the night sky, I saw the sea of stars way above my head. It was shining brightly, but their light was not enough to light up the path ahead of me. For someone like me who grew up in Tokyo all his life, the darkness of this night was a real shocker.

Maybe I should go back and borrow the damn lantern after all? But something tells me that even if I had a light with me, going to the Labyrinth while being surrounded by all that darkness would still be scary. I mean… what if a ghost shows up and suddenly jumps at me from behind? Normally I don't believe in the existence of ghosts and other supernatural beings, but if this is a world where magic exists, then it really wouldn't be strange for it to also have ghosts.

Oh jeez, what should I do?

I cannot get to the Labyrinth's entrance straight away since that is a Skill of an Adventurer, and I've yet to acquire that Job for myself (and I don't think I'm going to get it anytime soon). However, I do remember that one of the Bonus Skills available for me was the Warp spell. The specifics are not clear to me, but just by the name itself I could tell that it was a spell belonging to the Movement Magic category.

The real question here is: will I even be able to cast the damn thing? Because I had my doubts, bearing in mind my experiences with how quickly Overwhelm has sucked me dry of my MP. Then again, Warp was not an offensive type of magic, but Movement Magic just like Dungeon Walker, so it shouldn't use as much MP as Overwhelm, or, let's say Meteor Crash (the name sound cool as heck, but I'm not going to bother with picking it now, since I probably would not be able to cast it even once with my current stats). Plus, the levels of all my Jobs are higher now and I had a good long rest, so maybe that will also be a factor in the successful usage of magic, just like in Dungeons & Dragons?

Alright, you know the drill, Michio. Character Reset time!

Getting all of my Bonus Points back I used them to remove the shopping discount and got Durandal back. Then I also removed any Skills that won't be of any use to me during the Labyrinth exploration and used the Points that I got from doing so on the Bonus Spell option until I got the Warp spell. I turned towards the side of the inn and prepared myself to cast it, praying for it to work in the corner of my mind. Next, I summoned an image of the Labyrinth's entrance room. Then, with my eyes still closed, I reached out with my hand, but instead of stopping where the wall should be, it went right through it.

I did it! Holy cow I did it! Success! I have succeeded!!!

Successfully casting that spell made me immensely happy, but at the same time I could feel a slight prick of sadness in the depths of my heart. I wonder why is that. Successes, no matter how small of insignificant, should always be a reason ro rejoice, not feel down in the dumps. Be that as it may, all I could do now was to step forward, wondering if everything will be exactly the same as during my maiden raid, or will some things will change and the Labyrinth will try to throw a curve ball at me?

Just like before, the chamber I have ended up in was the very first one with three

corridors stretching in different directions. Yup, that's the entrance alright. Good thing that I managed to get here first try without any unfortunate accidents happening.

Even in the middle of the night, the room was still sufficiently lit. If I ended up in the middle of total darkness I think I'd cry then and there. Same if I was sent anywhere else than my intended destination and was forced to use Warp again. And speaking of Warp, let's have a look-see at the amount of MP it consumed… *sigh* almost as much as Overwhelming. I guess I should have expected an outcome like that. It's a Bonus Spell for a reason. So what I'm getting from this is that the general principle with Bonus Spells is that they consume a fuckton of MP, but their effects are that much powerful in return? Great, that's fucking awesome! This second visit to the Labyrinth is going great so far! Not even two minutes in and I'm already down to ¼ of my total MP! And if that wasn't clear by my current manner of goddamn speech. The negative effects of MP consumption are already kicking the fuck in! I feel depressed, dejected and overwhelmed (no pun intended) by an intense desire to strangle everything in my immediate vicinity!

But ok, whatever, it's fine! No, I mean really, it's all good. So what if I made an oopsie at the very beginning? It just means that I have to use Durandal's MP Absorption effect to recover all of the MP lost for that Warp spell. See, simple as that. Now I only have to thwart that crippling feeling of not wanting to be here and the urge to go back to my room at the inn to sleep and go forward to continue the process of money farming! Yay! Fun times ahead!

I entered the Labyrinth's corridors once again with such a mindset.

Just like the last time, Needlewood was the first enemy to appear before me. Pushing back any thoughts of running away I unsheathed Durandal and assumed my combat stance.

"Well then, here goes nothing… LEROOOOOOOY!!!!! JEEEEEEENKINS!!!!!!!!"

I was worried that the monsters roaming the Labyrinth's halls today might be stronger than the ones I have encountered yesterday, but thankfully the encounter was still decided with a single slash of my trusted Holy Sword. Needlewood disappeared in a cloud of green smoke, leaving some of its branches behind.

"Ahh, that hit the spot!"

Getting some of my MP back from the defeated Needlewood, I finally felt better. I exhaled heavily in relief. That demerit of losing MP is really something else man. A really nasty shit. And don't even get me started on how slow the actual procedure of absorbing MP from defeated enemies is. Even with something as OP as Durandal, I was only recovering a portion of it at a time, so if I wanted to get it all back I'd have to fight more enemies, which won't be hard, but extremely bothersome. If possible, I never want to experience something like that again, but there's not much that I can actually do about it except for holding back on using any Bonus Spells until I increase my levels and get myself some more MP.

After regaining some of my composure, I resumed the hunt for the monsters. In this Labyrinth, you had to walk around for a few minutes to encounter an enemy. I don't know if it's a rule for all of them or maybe just this one in particular, but what it means is that I won't be able to have as many encounters as I originally wanted. Right now, if I'll be able to battle 10 enemies in an hour I'll call it being lucky. Assuming I've entered the Labyrinth around 3:00 AM, I'd need at least 3 hours to get a decent amount of drops from defeated enemies. Maybe I'll be able to hunt down 20, but there's absolutely no way for me to get 30 of them.

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So after hunting down twenty enemies and obtaining twenty Needlewood Branches I decided to leave the Labyrinth. I was not in the mood nor condition to use Warp again, so I just went back to the entrance room and used Dungeon Walker. When I got outside, the sun was just about to rise, so I daresay that my timing couldn't have been more perfect.

I got back to the inn just in time to eat breakfast. Today's menu consisted of two items.

[Good morning sir. Shall I take you to your table? Have you already decided what you are going to eat?] [I haven't made the decision yet, but I'll probably settle for that one.]

I said pointing towards the plate that had more food on it than the other one.

[Understood. Your meal will be delivered to you shortly, so a moment of your patience, please.]

I was then guided to the same table where I was eating dinner yesterday. I would seem that every room has its assigned table, which was nice. At least it's going to spare me

the trouble of looking for it myself every day.

Even if it was called breakfast, I was astounded to see how much food it actually included. I guess since this world has only two meals, breakfast in the morning and dinner in the evening then both of them need to be filling so that the people wouldn't get hungry in the middle of the day after eating too little. Or maybe that is only the case for meals served at the inns?

After eating breakfast I went back to my room and laid down on the bed for a bit. I guess now would be a good time to sort through my Jobs again. My current lineup is as follows: Villager Lv.5, Hero Lv.2, Explorer Lv.3, Thief Lv.3, Warrior Lv.1, Merchant Lv.1, Swordsmen Lv.1.

The number of my Jobs is steadily increasing. I knew that some of the levels have increased before, since the total amount of my Bonus Points was higher than it was the last time I performed the Character Reset to get Durandal, but I wasn't aware of the fact that I got myself some more actual Jobs. I guess Warrior and Sword Master were obtained as a result of defeating monsters, and I must have gotten merchant due to all the items I sold. So going by that logic as long as you continue to do things associated with a given Job, you should obtain it sooner or later. Also, me getting Villager up to Lv.5 might have also been a factor here. Right now I was considering setting Explorer as my first Job, but I wonder if that will really be the smartest thing to do here? Even if I set the third Job, keep the shortening of the Skills cast time and Character Reset, I should still have around 100 Points to use. Things like warp and Job Settings can be applied whenever that will be necessary. However! If there are Jobs that can only be acquired by reaching Villager Lv.5, then there might be Jobs that I will only be able to get when Villager will reach Lv.10, right? And what about Lv.20, 30, 40 and so on, all the way to Lv.99? If that would be the case, then I still have a long way to go ahead of me, huh?

With all that being said, I decided to switch the first Job to Explorer after all. Hero will remain a second Job. As for the Third Job… maybe I'll set Warrior to it? But first, what are the specifics of that Job anyway?

Warrior Lv.1

Effect: Small increase in STR, Small increase of Skill damage

Skill: Rush

I can already tell that the effects of that Job are much better than that of Villager or Thief. And it even comes with a Skill! Swordsmen and Merchant were more or less the same, but if my memory serves me correctly th Slave Merchant said that by increasing the level of the Swordsmen Job I could eventually become a Bounty Hunter.

Skill-wise, Item Box and Dungeon Walker are essential to the maximum effectiveness of my money farming. Hero Job only has Overwhelming as a Skill, but it gives nice boosts to my stats so I would have to be a total idiot to remove it of my own free will. Currently I can only have three Jobs equipped at the same time, so ditching the Villager, a Job that has meh passive effects and no Active skills to speak of as well seems like the best course of action. I finished adjusting my Jobs and took out the item Box. Since my Explorer Job is now at Lv.3, then the number of available slots should have increased accordingly. I tried jamming the backpack in there, but it didn't want to go in no matter how hard I pressed down on it. I thought that maybe its size was the problem here, so I tried putting the coin purse there instead, but it was also to no avail. Maybe they cannot be placed inside because the system does not recognize them as proper items? Next I tried with branches, and they went in without a hitch, all nine of them. Then how about… coins?

I was able to store three gold coins inside of the Item Box. Just to be doubly sure I used Identify on them and sure enough, it showed that the gold coins in my possession were indeed the genuine gold coins. Great, so that does make it clear that those coins are recognized as items and eliminates the possibility of people trying to scam me with fake money. It was the same for the silver coins as well. But there was one restriction, albeit a small one: gold coins cannot be mixed with silver ones. One slot in the Item Box can hold either three gold coins or three silver coins. With the Explorer set as the first Job, it looks that the schematic is 3 items into one item slot. Oh, and the copper coins were a no-go as well. I don't know why they are not treated as items when silver and gold ones are.

Next came the inspection of skills. Judging by the names, the Skill of Warrior's Job, Rush and the Skill of Swordsmen's Job, Slash are probably Skills meant for attacking. I wanted to use Rush to test it out, but I wasn't able to do that since it wanted me to specify a target to use it against. But if I have Durandal which can pretty much one-shot every opponent so far, then do I really need those Skills? What about Merchant? It had the Skill called Calculation. I added the Merchant as a third Job and tried to use it by thinking about, but nothing happened. Like, at all, just like when I didn't even know how to use Skills at all.

Maybe I should try to actually calculate something? Hmm. Let's see… maybe 224 x 365? When I thought about that equation, the number 81 760 immediately came into my mind. Is that the answer? So Calculation has to be a passive Skill then. Okay, so how about something more complicated, just for the hell of it? If I were to earn 224 Nar every day for an entire year (365 days, assuming that the year has the same length here as it did in my old world) and kept it going for around 60 years that would give me… 4,905,600 gold coins total, so around 500 gold coins. With 500 gold coins, I could live in this inn literally until the day I died. Is that really right? It has to be. If I were to calculate this on my own I would surely make a mistake somewhere, but I was doing it with the Skill's aid, so it has to be accurate. 100 x 100 = 1 000 000, and 1 000 000 x 1 000 000 = 1 000 000 000 000…

Okay, that's enough quick mathing for today. My poor brain can only take so much until it will be fried from too much thinking.

CHAPTER 5
PRIZE MONEY

1

Player Name: Kaga Michio

Current Level and Equipment:

Explorer Lv.3

Hero Lv.2

Warrior Lv.1

Equipment:

Copper Sword

Leather Armor

Sandals

Taking a light power nap in my room I decided to take a short break from grinding in the Labyrinth to walk around the town some more. I had some time to think about my current situation, and I have to sadly conclude that with the current amount of money I can obtain from my dungeon-crawling expeditions, getting enough money to buy Roxanne will be impossible. The exact amount of money I can make by grinding monsters on the Labyrinths first floor for several hours is 200-300 Nar. At best I could earn a 1000 Nar, but only if luck was on my side. But then I had to consider the amount of money required to pay for an inn. It wasn't that much, but it's going to keep piling up, hindering my finances even more.

In the end, it all boils down to getting more money. All for the sake of buying Roxanne.

Even if I decided to go down to the Labyrinth's deeper levels, it would be foolish of me to expect that I'll ear 10 or 20 times more coin there. Maybe my luck would turn for the better if I happened upon a treasure chest, but so far I didn't stumble upon even one of those, making me feel like I shouldn't count on finding them at all.

I should focus my efforts on making money outside of the Labyrinth after all. There was one option that was available for me from the beginning, the one that might net me the highest profit.

Bounty Hunting.

When it comes to searching for possible Bandits, I just so happen to have a natural advantage in that field called Identify. With it, I can just take a casual stroll around town and scan everyone within my sight to see if their Job will point to them being a criminal. Making money just by looking at people and reading the information about them, that really seems like a dream job!

To be honest, I am still kinda reluctant about this Bounty Hunter business, but the fact that this line of work seemed to be made specifically for someone with my abilities is a fact that absolutely cannot be denied.

There seems to be no Thieves or Bandits or any other scum like that walking around Veil at the current moment, at least as far as I can tell. As expected, no one suspicious would be mad enough to walk around town in broad daylight. But if I want to increase my chances of finding someone like that, then maybe I should make my way to the northern part of the city, where Picker-san said the security was considerably weaker?

The center and the south of Veil were filled with big, beautiful-looking buildings and structures, but the further I went to the north, the more the quality and the size of the houses deteriorated. These have to be the quarters where the poorer citizens live, but it didn't quite have the look of a typical slum I was expecting to see. But just one step later…

…Yeah, it's a slum alright.

From where I was standing, I could see many more ruined buildings in the distance, and the smell of the air also worsened considerably. The same could be told about the people and the overall atmosphere of this place. With each step, the houses, became more and more dirty and unkept and the air grew even more stagnant. Looks like

some of the residents here didn't even have a place of their own, because they were just sitting or laying on the streets. There was even a small child standing in the middle of the road. It wasn't doing anything in particular. It was just standing there, looking absent-mindedly into space. It looked like it was sick for a very long time. I wonder if it even knows what a medicine is?

Anyway, hanging around here for too long might be a bad idea. This place is just too dangerous. Maybe it's because it's my first time being in a place like this, but my sixth sense was screaming for me to get the fuck out of here the entire time.

There's just something about the atmosphere of this place that just seems… off somehow, and I don't like it one bit.

Compared to this dumphole and its inhabitants, delinquents crouching outside of a convenience store with their bats and pipes in the dead of the night almost seemed friendly to me now. Yup, I think the best thing to do will be a tactical retreat. Yes, falling back to a safe place now!

Do I really have to go in there to find criminals? That place is just too dangerous for someone like me! I mean, of course it is, and I knew it well. Even in my old world, slums were never a place that was safe for proper, upstanding citizens to be in. And even if I managed to track even a single Bandit down without any major difficulties, there's no telling if his or her buddies won't be laying in wait to shank me when their buddy will be in danger. So for the time being, I retreated to the very edge of the slum area. If I don't know the terrain, it'd be best not to go in too deep.

A little bit to the east there were women who looked like prostitutes standing in front of the building that was most likely a brothel, because the men who were walking past it kept casting glances towards it and the girls in front of it, which wasn't all that weird because the outfits they were wearing were rather… eye-catching, so to speak. Maybe I would have gone in and used their services myself if I wasn't warned that each and every one of them was supposedly riddled with STD's according to both Picker-san's and Alan-san's words. But putting the matter of their health aside, wouldn't you say that brothels are the exact place that comes to mind when talking about hangout spots for suspicious dudes?

Some distance away from the brothel, a crowd of people was forming up, with lots and lots of slum dwellers gathering in one spot. I wonder if something happened over there. Maybe I should go have a look at it myself? While preparing to use Identify, I

joined in with the rest of the crowd. Let's see, what the hell is that whole commotion about?

The source of the growing uproar was a patch of dirty, cracked road where someone has apparently fallen down. When I used Identify to appraise the guy who was lying on the ground, the information that showed up was not the person's name or Job, but the name of a piece of equipment: Leather Armor.

In other words, whoever that poor lad was, he was dead. How do I know this? Because apparently corpses are no longer recognized as human beings, and therefore they cannot be properly Identified.

"That's a filthy thief! That man was robbed I tell you!"

"How do you know that?"

At the back of the crowd, a merchant was talking with an older-looking Adventurer. They were talking in Brahim, so I could understand everything they were saying.

"Isn't that obvious?! Just look at his hands! See? The left one has been chopped off!"

"Ah, now that I take a closer look, you're actually right."

"Oh, looks like he's been offed less than half an hour ago."

I couldn't see it properly from where I was standing, but it looks like the corpse in the street was missing it's left hand. Maybe it was because the culprit wanted to hide the victim's identity? After all, it takes up to 30 minutes for the Intelligence Card to disappear naturally after death. But I better not say that out loud. The last thing I want is to attract more unnecessary trouble towards me.

"Make way! Make way I said! Let me through!"

Someone must have already reported that there was a crime, because the knights from the guardhouse have already arrived on the scene, with the beautiful female Knight from earlier leading them. So I guess that in this city the knights act like the police, huh?

"A Bandit. Go and clean the body up. Once you do, dispose of it."

“Yes, ma’am!”

The female Knight barely even glanced at the body before issuing her orders. This was obviously a murder case, and they’re going to do literally nothing about it? That’s cold.

“Our business here is done. Everyone, back to the guardhouse!”

She ordered her company to return to their station, climbed on top of her stallion and headed back as well. Wait, is that it? Are they really going to leave this case as it is?! And everyone is fine with that?

Apparently everyone was indeed fine with it, because as soon as the female Knight left the crime scene the crowd naturally dissipated and everything went back to normal as if nothing had happened.

2

Now that this mini-event has finished I just walked around the vicinity, listening to the conversations that people around me were having in Brahim. Out of all the people who were forming a fired-up crowd just a second ago, no one seemed to be complaining about the knight’s behaviour towards handling the murder that apparently took place. Is that response considered to be normal here? Does no one really care that much?

“The Bandits who have been driven out of town came back to exact their revenge.”

I suddenly heard someone speaking behind my back.

Revenge? Someone was killed for such a petty reason?

I hurriedly looked over my shoulder. I have no idea who said that just now, but it had to be someone who witnessed the gathering of the crowd and the arrival of the group of knights. So if that mysterious voice is to be believed there is a group of Bandits in the city that is out for blood. Without knowing the source of that information it might not serve as enough of an evidence if I chose to go to the town guard with it, but even so this is a matter that simply cannot be overlooked. If what that beautiful Female Knight was saying was true, the Bandits who attacked the village were originally from the slums of this town. Maybe the ones who did this were their friends or acquaintances? And most importantly, did only one of them wanted revenge, or were they all hell-bent on it as well?

Suddenly I felt my stomach tying itself into multiple knots and a wave of cold sweat rushing down my back. What… what if I'm one of the targets of their revenge?

No, nononono, that cannot be it. That's absolutely not possible. Think about it calmly, you moron! Them being out for revenge probably has nothing to do with me at all.

First and foremost, the most likely reason for their revenge is the fact that they have been kicked out of the town, and I had nothing to do with it since I literally wasn't even existing in this world until a few days ago.

Secondly, none of the Bandits who attacked the village survived. I have slain all of them together with the rest of the villagers (although I did the lion's share of the work).

Thirdly, even if some of them managed to survive the attack, finding someone without having a nice long look at his face should be borderline impossible in this technology=free world that probably never heard of something as abstract as photographs.

But that does not mean that I can feel relieved just yet. Even if their goal is to take revenge for being driven out of town, I cannot imagine a group of Bandits willingly going against an entire Knight Order. It would be nothing short of suicidal unless they'd have the advantage of both numbers and equipment, which I'm sure they don't have right now. But if the grudge they are holding against Veil is strong, Then I don't think a setback or two would be enough to discourage them from pushing through with whatever it is they might be planning. They might have even obtained information about me through some illegal means unknown to me.

Whatever the Bandits intentions might be, I still can't rule out the possibility that I might end up being targeted myself. Until I find and deal with them, I won't be able to have a peaceful night's rest. With all that said, looks like my decision to switch from dungeon crawling to Bandit hunting was the right one after all.

I have spent the next two days exploring the town of Veil while avoiding getting too close to the slums. I wasn't able to find any of the Bandits, but at the very least I got the general feeling of the topography and the layout of the terrain in the slums. At the very least that's going to save me some MP I would otherwise wasted on using warp to get around here.

I also understood why the slums were build in the northern part of the town.

Two rivers run through the city of Veil. Both of them enter the city from the south and exit through the north. That water is used a well behind the inn I am currently staying at, acting as the source of drinking water, and probably bathwater for the customers as well, and all the inn's sewage is probably drained to the sewers that run all the way beneath the city. The water that enters the town from the south is clear, but the further it travels downstream to the north the dirtier it gets. While I was making my way through the slums, I could faintly smell the smell of bad, almost rotten water in the air.

Nobody would want to willingly live in such a place. The distinction seems to be clear here: the southern part of the city is where the rich people and the business canter dwells while the northern part is comprised entirely of slums and the quarters of the poor and those who could not afford to live in the southern part. I wonder if I didn't see any Bandits or other criminals because they were being careful not to be spotted? I don't think that many people can use Identify besides myself, but maybe they just don't want their faces to be seen or they are only active in the middle of the night? Also, the possibility that I won't even be able to meet them inside the slums at all was extremely likely. If they were exiled from the town, they might as well have their base of operations outside of it.

With nothing better to do at the current moment I made my way to the Labyrinth. Instead of worrying about the things beyond my reach, I might as well try to get myself a treasure chest. That, and I also might try to gain myself some levels, just to be on the safe side if I really end up fighting against the Bandits. I know that technically I don't have to worry about anything as long as I have Durandal, but you know what they say: if the wielder's shit, even the greatest of weapons will be shit as well.

I gained a few levels, so now using Warp should be that much easier for me. Maybe I will even be able to use it two times in a row without exhausting my MP pool? The number of available slots in my Item Box has also increased accordingly. My current levels are as follows: Explorer Lv.6, Hero Lv.4 and Warrior Lv.4. Since Explorer has been set as my first Job, it should now figure as my main Job on my Intelligence Card.

Usually labyrinth's often tend to have secret passages and hidden doors in them, and this one was no exception from that rule. Way in the back of the first floor there was a small room behind a hidden door. When you passed it, you ended up in another small room similar to the one at the entrance. Just like that one, it also had a number of branching pathways extending from it, which created a truly magnificent maze. After checking every nook and cranny at the first floor, I made my way over there. When I stopped in front of one of the walls, a part of it made a rattling noise and then slowly

slid down, revealing the pathway I was looking for. I went through it to proceed with my search. At first I didn't even realized that there was even a door since all I did was going back and forth between the places I have already explored. That was the safest method, but admittedly it was not very efficient, so the discovery of that new hidden passage was truly a Godsend to me.

I might have not made any progress when it comes to the Bandit search, but as a consolation prize the exploration of the Labyrinth entered a brand-new stage!

Today my current excursion into the Labyrinth occurred towards the end of the day, after I spend the daytime on another fruitless Bandit search in the slums of Veil. I wanted to do so mainly to improve my mood as I waited for the situation in the city to change.

I once again made my way to the end of the first floor and waited for the portion of the wall to slide down, allowing me a passage to the hidden section. I wanted to go inside immediately, but…

"……"

But someone was already there.

Brown bodies with green heads. And not just two or three. There was so many Needlewoods here that they could make an entire bush or a small forest if they were to be placed beside each other, and they were all staring at me as if they wanted to say "What the fuck are you looking at?!", or "You picked the wrong cave, fool!".

"*Sigh*……. fuck."

I said brandishing my Durandal as the enemies rushed towards me like an army of green, spiky toddlers.

3

Even though the enemies had an overwhelming numbers advantage over me, avoiding their attacks was nothing difficult. I avoided the ones coming at me from the right by stepping to the side and pulling my right hand back, and then I raised Durandal in front o f me to block the attacks that were coming at me from the front. Then I spun around on my heel and sliced the monsters around me in half from top to bottom.

At one point I thought about using Dungeon Walker to get myself some more maneuvering space, but even with the complete chant the black portal on the wall did not appear. I suspected that something like that might happen. Looks like Dungeon walker cannot be used in the middle of combat. I should try that again when there will be only one enemy, but for now let's ditch the experiments and focus on the task at hand!

The number of enemies was much bigger than I have initially anticipated. How many does that make now? A dozen? More than a dozen? Anyway, there is just so many of them. I'm lucky that I began to fall back towards the room's entrance, otherwise I would have been surrounded in no time.

Maybe I should really consider escaping? Unfortunately, that does not look like a possibility here. With their numbers, even if I tried to make a run for it, they would just come right after me and swarmed all over me. Nah, if I have time to think about such what if's, then I should just divert the energy spent for that towards cutting them all down.

I slashed at the Needlewood that came at me from the right. After that, another Needlewood attacked me from the left, but I failed to block its attack in time, which resulted in a sharp pain pulsating from my left shoulder.

The entrance to the cave was small, but it will be impossible for me to keep defending myself here all the time. If the battle goes any longer, then the Needlewoods in here might call for reinforcements, causing me to be attacked both from the front and the back. Maybe at the very least I should put my back against the wall to protect it from a surprise attack?

I ignored the monsters to the left and moved to the right. I was wondering if I should try using Overwhelming? No, I shouldn't do it just yet. If I end up using all of my MP on ordinary mobs, I won't be able to cast Skills when I will really need them.

I was beginning to get a little tired, but I did my best to push that feeling out of my mind and continued to slash at the Needlewoods that tried to approach me. I simply continued to hit the enemies before me with my Durandal. Next, with my right foot planted firmly forward I started two-handing Durandal, cutting down anything that dared to approach me, be it from the front, the sides or the back. To be honest, it felt as if the time around me had slowed down considerably.

As I continued to swing my arms I was moving fore=ward, step by step. All this time I delivered painful attacks to the Needlewoods while sustaining very little damage myself.

Finally I reached another small cavern. When I placed my back against the wall, I have effectively reduced the monster's range of attack to only 180 degrees instead of 360. If I could freely move between all four corners of the room that would allow me to reduce that range by another half, to 90 degrees, but in my current situation such greed was probably ill-advised.

For a moment, my sudden movements were enough to disrupt the swarm of enemies, but nothing I did was able to change the fact that they were still coming in after me.

Soon there will be so many of them that they will completely fill up the cave, leaving me no space to move myself.

I pulled back and fixed Durandal's position in my hands and blocked the strike that was coming towards me from the left and whacked the Needlewood, but in return I was struck in my exposed right shoulder.

Guh!

Another slash took care of another two Needlewoods, but got me another hit, this time on the left shoulder.

Gwaah!

Another monster was split diagonally from the shoulder, but its needles pierced into my right side.

Damn this hurts like hell!

More and more of their attacks is hitting me. If this was still a one-on-one fight I would not have been hit even once, but this is one vs. many here, with me being at a clear disadvantage, so I do what I can, that is to say I swing Durandal left and right, up and down. Thankfully Durandal has the MP Absorption Skill, so if I wanted, I could have unleashed some of them just as long as I'd have enough enemies left to replenish the MP I have spent. But that goes only for MP. If I continue to get randomly hit like that, at some point my HP is bound to get critically low to the point that not even HP Absorption is going to recover it fast enough, and that is something that I wanted to

avoid at all costs.

Sigh… Alright, I guess it's time to pop Overwhelming. If using it can help me get out of this sticky situation, then so be it!

Instead of expending all of Overwhelming's power in one strike, I tried to suppress it so that I could use it continuously, and then slashed at the two monsters that were the closest to me. When the Skill's effect ended, I have slammed my back against the wall again. This might be working, but I still have to be mindful of getting myself surrounded.

As I was moving along the wall to reach the room's corner on the right I avoided another Needlewood that tried to slash me with its branches. Damn, just when the Overwhelming's effects stopped working! And just 1 Needlewood won't be enough to get back the MP that I just used. As a result, I could feel my head being gradually filled with negative thoughts. Urgh, I knew I should have used that damn Skill only when the MP bar has been completely filled! Now I'll start acting more and more like an emo, and I don't want that in the middle of the fucking combat! And the worst part here is that if the negative thoughts begin to accumulate, they will have a huge negative effect on my battle performance. On the other hand, even if it costs me the mood swings, I should be using Overwhelming as much as I can to cull the enemy's numbers as much as possible. Everything to come out on top here.

Another attack came at me from the left so I deflected it, only to be struck in the right shoulder again. For now HP Absorption manages to keep me afloat, but I cannot feel relieved by that at all. If the barrage of enemy attacks continues like that, the total damage should be enough to put me in the red zone of my HP bar. I guess you could say that I'm balancing on a really, reaaaally thin thread right now.

As it is now, the battle was going back and forth over and over again without any clear sign that the impasse I have found myself at is going to be broken.

A certain thought has popped into my head. What if I die in here? Even though this world is totally different from my old one, it is my new reality, so being felled by monsters would spell the absolute, unavoidable death for me.

Death.

Death is close at hand. It's so close that I can practically feel its icy embrace closing around me. It's scary, but at the same time it is not. I'm not shaking in my boots, but

I'm also not laughing about it either. Maybe that's because I was in the middle of a battle? Is it always like that? Are warriors able to calmly stare death right in the face and not feel a single thing?

The next few Needlewoods that came closer to me got sliced into pieces. Even when some of their attacks manage to reach me and inflict damage I'm letting it slide as long as I can reach them with my blade to get back the HP that I lost. Little by little, this back and forth we're having is starting to create a path that I can use to advance and move forward as I continue to slice & dice the branches that aim for me and cut their owners with Durandal in return.

I guess that's all there really is to it. Even if death is literally knocking at my door, all I can do is to continue to fight. So as I continue for another corner of the room, I'm trying to defeat as many monsters as possible. And before I knew it, the number of Needlewoods between me and the right corner of the room were reduced to only two.

That is my chance!

4

I unleashed Overwhelming once again. First I slaughtered the Needlewood right in front of me and immediately followed with a diagonal slash to the right. The Skills effects have diminished by that point, but despite that I still followed the previous two attacks with a third one where I raised Durandal high into the air and slammed it into the ground with all my strength, slashing the third Needlewood cleanly in half.

I finally arrived in the corner that I wanted to reach so desperately, all the while avoiding the attacks of the monsters who were still right on my tail. With this, the angle they can attack me from has been reduced to about 90 degrees. Lowering Durandal to the level of my waist, I looked through the room to assess my current situation.

First thing I noticed almost right away was the enemy's numbers were greatly reduced. I only saw that now because I actually had the time to look around calmly, without having to swing Durandal left and right to avoid being overrun by the brownish-green abominations. Now there was only ten or so of them left. This made me realize that one of my earlier statements was a big fat lie: while I thought I was staring death in the face calmly, I was never calm at all. All this time I was simply thrashing around like a scared child oblivious to everything that's been going on

around it. If I just took a damn moment to actually observe what was happening around me maybe I wouldn't be so obsessed with going from corner to corner like an idiot. Yup, my observational skills are truly of the Godly levels it seems.

The next thing I noticed was the fact that my hands were sweaty as fuck. Like seriously, they are like friggin waterfalls right now. That's why I have to be extremely careful. If I end up dropping Durandal, even by accident, that's probably going to be a game over for me. So I did the only thing I could have done in this situation: even if I knew I'm going to get attacked, I wiped my sweaty hands in my pants. Several vines of the Needle woods attacked me during that short while, but there was nothing I could do about it, since that was more important to me. I gripped Durandal again, this time with sweat-free hands and run to the right.

First I dispatched the farthest Needlewood to the right. Now that so many enemies have been dispatched, I should be able to move however I want, or in other words: Go wild with my OP as shit holy sword!

I jumped forward, swinging Durandal all around me, ruthlessly decimating the branches that were shot in my direction. They are being cut down as if they were no more than the blades of wilted grass, and their owners soon follow after them. Continuing the battle with the leftover enemies in such a manner, I kept on pressing forward.

Another two Needlewoods came at me from the front, so I cut them down. Another one tried to ambush me from the left with its branches, but I dodged them and immediately countered with a slash that went upwards and to the left, and used the created momentum to deliver another powerful downward slash that instantly killed another Needlewood in front of me.

There are only three enemies remaining.

I am not going to run away now, and it looks like they are not going to run away either. I invoked Overwhelming again, defeating two of them with a single slash of my sword.

Only one enemy remaining now.

It rushed towards me head-on with its spiky army and vines, but before they could so much as reach me, I strongly stepped down with my left foot and swung Durandal from the last Needlewood's left shoulder all the way to its right leg.

“Haaah…”

When it was all over, I finally had the time to catch my breath in peace. That should be all of them, right? I have defeated all of the monsters that ambushed me back in that room, right? Apparently that has to be the case, because when the last of the Needlewoods finally evaporated into a puff of green smoke, there was no more of them coming out to get me. Even though it was finally all over, it still took me a good while for my ragged breath to return to normal.

Okay… now that that’s taken care of… maybe I’ll finally have a chance… to look around the room I am currently in.

Characteristics-wise, it was the same small cave as all the other caves I have passed through on this floor. Same walls, same ceiling and the same doorway that you would find in the other parts of this Labyrinth, in other words: everything here was perfectly ordinary, except that the floor was now littered with the branches that all of the defeated Needlewoods left behind when they perished by my sword.

Is there anything else here that’s noteworthy? No, I don’t think so. I mean, it would be great if a treasure chest or a piece of some legendary equipment were to appear before me right now, but come on, what are the odds of something like that happening? But just in case…

As I went around the room collecting Needlewood Branches from the ground I made sure to scan the entire area with my sight again, but regrettably I have truly found one big pile of nothing. So was that simply a room filled with monsters? Because if so, then that’s truly a pity. That was the worst random event I could have stumbled upon here. Let’s face the facts here: if I didn’t have Durandal with its OP as fuck abilities with me, I would have been killed like some random rookie Adventurer who wandered into the Dungeon unprepared, underlevelled and underequipped because he thought that everything’s going to work out just fine because that’s the first Dungeon in the game, only to be brutally buttraped by reality. This Labyrinth… I have to admit that it is much more dangerous than I have initially anticipated.

Does that mean I should just ran away from here with my tail tucked between my legs? Absolutely not! As long as I have Durandal and my Skills, I can still fight, even if the enemies might be stronger than me. I have already made my decision to live in this world, so I cannot allow a minor setback such as this to discourage me from going forward!

I finished gathering all the branches, and since there's nothing else here in this room, I'd best be on my way. I already wasted enough time here as it is.

I brought up the Job Settings menu. My current levels are as follows: Explorer Lv.8; Hero Lv. 5, Warrior Lv.6, Villager Lv.5, Merchant Lv.1, Swordsman Lv.10. I also didn't get any new Jobs, which is strange, because I was sure that singlehandedly defeating so many monsters was bound to get me at least one new Job. Also, the levels of my Jobs start to look really nice. Not to mention that when I used that last Overwhelming during the end of the battle, I wasn't feeling depressed or swarmed by the dark thoughts. That was probably due to the fact that my level had increased and my MP regenerated at that moment. That would also explain why am I not experiencing that gradual feeling of mental recovery that I used to feel whenever my MP was going back to the certain amount.

It is a little bit early, but let's leave the Labyrinth for now. After a round of walking around the town I returned to the inn. As expected, I caught no sign of bandits at all. If I want to find them, I guess I'll have no other option but to go deeper into the slums.

"I'd like to rent a room for another night. I'll also be having a dinner, and after that, give me a some hot water and a lamp."

"As you wish, kid. So a diner, hot water and a lamp… you know what, I'm feeling generous today, so I'll be charging you only 245 Nar for all of that."

The Innkeeper told me. A single batch of hot water costs 20 Nar, and If I'm remembering correctly the rent for the lamp (an oil lamp, by the way) was certainly 10 Nar. Curiously enough, when I bought the hot water yesterday my 30% discount didn't work, but today it worked like a charm! Maybe the discount is not taking effect if you're only buying a single item? That is a possibility that I'll have to check later.

"Do I have to show you my Intelligence Card again?"

"No need for that if you're renewing your stay. Your room is the same one as before, do go ahead and enjoy our stay."

And he offered me a familiar key, which I took upstairs, feeling glad that I won't have to flash my Intelligence Card every time I'll be renewing my stay here.

5

After I ate my meal and returned to my room to have a short rest, there was this thought that stuck in my head and didn't want to leave no matter how hard I tried to divert my attention away from it.

Whether it's my death or the death of a common Bandit or even an ordinary citizen or members of the nobility, this world is the one where death is incredibly cheap and easy to come across. And whether I like it or not, I have to live in such a world now. This is one thing that is similar to my old world: if someone is standing in your way, all you have to do to ruin that someone's life it to make him a criminal in the eyes of the public, and that would be enough for his reputation to be destroyed. As much as I want to say that it's nice to see that some things do not change even in different worlds, this is one thing that I would have gladly got ridden of.

And speaking of criminals, it would seem that I have no other option but to go deeper into the slum area if I want to find where the Bandits are hiding. What was that old saying again? "*You won't catch the tiger's cub if you won't enter its den*" or something like that? Or was it actually "You won't get a fetus unless you stick it in the hole"?

Anyway, after leaving the inn I made my way to the slums, but instead of only lurking around its edges this time I actually went inside, making my way to the north along the slums' "main road". Along the way, I saw that one of the street corners was especially bright and lively. It was a building like any other, about one story high with the entrance and the windows facing the road, but that was most definitely a brothel. How can I be so sure of that? Well for starters, the woman standing in front of the building had only the bare minimum of clothing covering her body, and the other similarly dressed women were peeking from the windows on the first floor, seductively beckoning any men who were passing by to come inside. I have to admit, it all looked very inviting, totally different than it was during the daytime, and if I wasn't warned about the dangers of such establishments before, maybe I would have allowed myself to be swallowed up by that atmosphere and my adolescent desires as well…

No! I didn't come here to visit brothels! I am on a much more important mission! I won't be entering, but maybe, just maybe I could look at them girls some more… oh man this is exciting. Just from looking at them practically flashing all the goods out in the open like that my heart is racing like crazy…

Wait. Dude, just stop, take a deep breath and calm yourself down! Remember the warning you claimed to have known not even a minute ago. If you go there, you will most certainly catch some nasty illness. You also might end up ripped off and robbed. So what is the obvious solution to all those problems? A very simple one: NOT GOING INSIDE! Besides, those prostitutes might be attractive, but upon closer inspection none of them is as beautiful as Roxanne, so even if I did entered the brothel I don't think I'd be satisfied with any of the girls in there. So instead, I decided to keep my distance and eavesdrop on the prostitutes in front of the building. Who knows, maybe I'll be able to learn something interesting? Assuming that the bustling of the main street will allow me to hear a damn thing.

Thankfully, the noise of the surroundings wasn't the problem in the slightest, but another obstacle has presented itself before me: I can't understand a word of what that prostitute was saying. I heard her talking without any issue, but she was not speaking in Brahim. She was using some language that was totally unknown to me. In fact, none of the people around the brothel seemed to be speaking in Brahim at all! I guess I wasn't paying attention to that little detail up until this point because I could communicate with the Innkeeper and the workers in the guilds just fine, but it looks like the linguistic situation is the same here as it was back in the village: the people who are able to speak Brahim appear to be a strict minority. Instead, they must be speaking with a language, or perhaps a dialect used only by the locals. Well, if I search around some more, then maybe I'll be able to find a prostitute who actually speaks Brahim, so that might be worth a shot.

I wandered around the slums until the light in my rented lantern went out, and then decided to head back to the inn by using Warp. I could have returned back on foot, but after concluding that strolling around the slums without any light at such an hour might not be the best idea I decided against it. Besides, even if I had to back on foot, I don't know if I could find my way around the slums in complete darkness. I could probably get back to the brothel area because it was not that far away from the main part of the city, but anything other than that would just be plain risky.

In order not to attract any needles attention to myself I warped behind the inn and then casually went to the front. After returning the lantern to the Innkeeper, I went back to my room to catch some z's.

I woke up around midnight, went to the lobby, left the key at the counter and headed for the slums one more time. The Innkeeper game me a glance, but didn't ask any further questions. The streets were dark as all hell, but I managed to go back to the

brothel area without much difficulty. I wanted to eavesdrop on the prostitutes again, but it looks like all of them either went to sleep of retreated to the brothel's rooms with the customers they manage to score for themselves. Welp, in that case, let's scan the surroundings with Identify, maybe that is going to yield some results.

The information of a single person appeared before my eyes. So there is someone here after all. Also, I already kinda knew it from my excursions to the Labyrinth, but it looks like the ability to Identify something does not depend on the light in your immediate surroundings, since Identify also worked in the dim light of the caverns.

The person I detected was a lone 26 years old Villager woman. It looked like she was some distance away from me, but in this darkness I couldn't tell exactly how far it really was. But that is not important right now. The biggest question tha has to be answered right now is: what the hell is she doing alone in such a place at such an odd hour?

I tried to follow her while making as little noise as possible, but after a few steps I had to duck behind one of the nearby house's walls because the corner of the building on the other side of the street has suddenly became very bright. Looks like someone who was carrying a torch was coming in the direction of the woman.

There were three men in total. And their designation… Bandits! All three of them are labeled as Bandits! That is the first time I have actually found Bandits ever since I've come to this town a few days ago. But their levels are quite low. All of them had a single digits. Out of all the Bandits who attacked the village, only two of them had decent prizes for their heads: the Bandit Leader and the guy who looked like his second-in-command, in other words, the only Bandits who had their levels consisting of two digits. By the looks of it, if the Bandit does not have a level consisting of at least two digits, so Lv.10 at minimum, the prize for slaying him will be so laughably miniscule that hunting them almost seems like a waste of one's time.

The three Bandits began to move apart from one another, but close enough to each other to stay withing the light of their torches and jump at the potential prey should the need arose. Man, I already feel sorry for whoever is going to stumble upon them. I was seriously contemplating if I should just get the fuck out of there by using Warp when I heard someone scream. Alerted, the three Bandits turned their heads sharply and headed for the scream's source. But who could have been…

Oh no. Oh fuck. Oh fuck no.

6

As the three Bandits moved forward the light of their torches eventually revealed the presence of the Villager woman to them. She tried run away, but she tripped over her own legs and hit the ground pretty hard after only a few meters.

[X X X X! X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X!] [X X X! X X X X X X X! X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X

important now. What matters is that due to her misfortune she got beaten up, and now she will probably become a plaything for those guys.

Of course, I'm not proud of myself for not helping her, but even if I tried to do so, attacking those three blindly would have been a bad idea. That group only consisted of three Bandits, but who knows if there are no other, larger groups nearby. It's true that I want to find Bandits so I can take them down and collect the prize money, but nothing good would come to me from recklessly starting a war with them without any information about them.

At the very least, that encounter showed me that they are a violent bunch. Maybe that violent tendencies were one of the reasons for their banishment from the city? I also pretty much confirmed that they are present in the slums, and that they are quite possibly ruling it from the shadows with an iron grip of violence.

With the knowledge that I have obtained from this chance encounter, my current plan of action will be as follows: wait until tomorrow night and go to the part of the slams with the brothels (let's call it brothel district) around the same hour as today. If I happened upon three random. Bandits by a complete accident, then if I play my cards right I may be able to find the Bandits that I'm looking for.

And just like that, after going back to the inn and sleeping until morning I've spent the majority of the day in the Labyrinth (making sure to avoid any suspicious-looking pathways in order not to bring another ordeal like that previous one down on myself, and after that I got back to my room and slept until dinnertime.

And now, sometime after midnight, my mission to infiltrate the brothel district in search of the source of the Bandits begins!

My first observation: even though the brothel district is quite busy, the closing hours come relatively fast. I wonder if that is a principle that holds true for all the brothels in this world, or is it a phenomenon unique only to the ones in Veil? Well, I call them closing hours, but I'm sure that just means that some of the richer customers simply stay in them overnight. Come to think of it, that's actually a pretty valid strategy: get as many potential customers right before the closing hours arrive and coerce them into staying the entire night, adequately increased prices be damned.

The hour was late, the shops were closed, and no people to be seen walking around on the streets. A perfect time for the Bandits to start appearing out of nowhere, and

they did. So my initial assumption was correct: they really do come out during the nighttime, I just failed to nail the approximate hour correctly. Now they were casually walking around the streets like they owned the place, unafraid of being found out by the guards, because let's face it, no guardsmen with his sanity still intact would willingly go on a patrol to the slums in the dead of the night. Some of them simply walked around, and some of them were entering bars and houses that I thought were long closed. So it looks like that they have their own places for entertainment, hidden away from the prying eyes of those who would seek to deliver them to justice. If I hadn't decided to come here this late, I would have never learned that valuable piece of information. But that is still not enough for me to just go and randomly attack them.

For now I have to continue observing them from the safe distance.

Observation number 2: the Bandits who wander around the slums probably do not belong to a single group, but must be divided into separate ones that might be rivaling one another. I have arrived at that conclusion after witnessing that some of the smaller groups of Bandits avoided making any kind of contact with certain other groups, and that not every group was going to all the establishments opened for criminals. Maybe that has to something with some kinda turf wars between them? Anyway I didn't bring any lanterns with me this time, so as long as I stick to the shadows I probably won't have to worry about being caught.

Some of the Bandits walked together and were chatting with each other, but those were always the ones who were dressed in similarly looking attires of possessing some article of clothing that made them distinguishingly different from the others, and it would seem that those groups were going in circles around specific areas while maintaining a safe distance from the other groups. Maybe they really are patrolling their respective territories?

The ones I am tailing now wear the same clothes that that the Lv.9 guys I have encountered yesterday wore, and the area that they are going around is close to the place where they ganged up on that 26 years old Villager woman. Is this their territory? If so, then it does not seem to be very wide.

After tailing them for a few more rounds, I had a stroke of luck, because the guys I have been following actually met with the Bandit from yesterday who could speak Brahim! Awaiting how the situation was going to develop, I gently approached them while making sure that my presence was being obscured by the darkness the entire time. Maybe their territory really is that small, or maybe there is just not that many people

patrolling it at the moment, but this is definitely near the place I saw the Brahim speaking guy yesterday, so could it be that their hideout is somewhere nearby? If that is the case, then maybe their group really isn't that big after all. If so, then maybe I'd actually have a fighting chance against them?

[X X X X X Hugo X X X X X.]

Well that's something new. Another Bandit from a different group has appeared, and he started talking with my Lv.9 target, but not in Brahim so I obviously couldn't understand a word they were saying and that was driving me nuts! Just what are you bastards talking about?! I didn't come this far to be cockblocked at the point of entry now!

7

Huh? Did I just hear that correctly? I could swear that in the middle of the sentence that I couldn't make heads or tails of. I heard a single word that I was able to understand: Hugo. Or was it just my imagination? Hugo. Hmm… If I remember correctly, that was the name of the Bandit Leader who attacked the village together with his people. There could be no doubt about it, because back when we were making appraisals after the battle ended that was the name that was present on the Bandit Leader's Intelligence Card. Why did his name come up now of all times? And another question: is the leader of those Lv.9 Bandits also one of the criminals who were cast out of the city, or is he perhaps just someone related to them, but not directly involved?

A few hours later, just before dawn when it was still dark I went to the back of the brothel district again. But this time instead of walking all the way there I used Warp to teleport there in an instant. Apparently as long as it was a place that you saw with your own eyes, you could use Warp to get there without any issues. In other words, it's like I have my very own fast travel system.

I warped to the back of the building that was at the opposite side of the street to the brothel. It was the perfect observation spot, since even during the day most of that building was hidden in the pitch black shade. The only part of it that was a little brighter was the eastern part. While camping there, I patiently waited for the sun to rise and for the people to leave the brothel after the night they had spent there.

Most of the people who were leaving the building were labeled as Male Villagers. Wow, who knew that so many of them were using such establishments? Then again, seeing

as how this world is modeled after the middle ages, perhaps I shouldn't be too surprised. Most of them were carrying lanterns in one of their hands, most probably the one they brought with them yesterday night. Understandably, I didn't brought my own with me again in order to avoid gaining too much attention. When the men were leaving the brothel, almost all of them were making their way towards the exit from the slums. The lights of the lanterns they were carrying around with them were a real hindrance, making it difficult to get a good look at their faces, and that makes my investigation that much more difficult. If I could just see the faces of the customers who were leaving the brothel, then maybe I could spot someone suspicious or someone whose face practically screams "Hey, I'm a criminal!". Not to mention that the Bandits might be hiding their Bandit Job in the same way I have kept my Thief Job hidden from everyone. That's why for the current moment the visual clues might be my best bet, but as I have already said, those pesky lanterns are not exactly making my job any easier! Ugh, if only they didn't have as many of them! Why did they even bother with setting the light in them again when the sun is going to be illuminating the entire slum any minute now?! Sigh, now when my initial plan has officially gone out the window, I guess there's no reason for me to stay here in this corner anymore, so I left my hiding spot and proceeded to walk along the street, just like everybody else around me. Using the increasing stream of people to blend into the surroundings of the slums I made my way across the brothel district, but before I go anywhere else I have to check that alleyway where the Villager woman has been dragged by the Bandits.

The alley itself was a rather short one, and at the and of it was a perfectly ordinary one story house. This clearly isn't a brothel. Maybe this is the Bandit's hideout? It certainly doesn't look like it, but it is exactly that quality that makes that option all the more viable. I can't just stand outside of it and stare mindlessly, so I will just pass it by without stopping or glancing in its general direction.

I just noticed it right now, but in the morning the brothel district looks like a perfectly normal town, all things considered. It certainly doesn't feel like a part of the slums. I guess it has to do so, because if it reeked like the rest of the slums then no one would want to visit it, since normal citizens want nothing to do with the poorer parts of the city at all. I hanged around the slums for a bit more and then once again headed back to the inn. I went out there again during the proper daytime, but I couldn't spot any thieves at all. As expected, they must be holed up in their hideouts throughout the day.

[One night with dinner, hot water after the meal.] [As you wish. One night stay with dinner and hot water. And since you've been behaving so far and you're not stirring

any trouble, then I'll give you a special discount. 238 Nar please.]

That was the exchange I had with the Innkeeper as soon as I returned to the inn in the evening. This time I got a discount even without asking him to borrow the lamp. Looks like the only time when my 30% discount is not kicking in is when I ask him for just the hot water and nothing else.

[You know, a few days ago there was a murder not that far away from here.]

Under the guise of striking a casual conversation I wanted to see if I could get some useful information out of him.

[Ahh, that incident, huh? You don't have to worry about anything as long as you're staying here since this place is one of the safest in the entire city, even more so if you're staying away from the slums and its brothels.] [How can you be so sure of that?]

He really seems to know something. If that's the case, then I want him to spill as much beans as possible. The knowledge he is privy to might be the exact thing needed for the continuous peaceful existence of this inn and it's guests, and who knows, maybe even the inns and their guests around the entire city?

[That was a part of a battle for the influence between the criminals nesting in the slums.] [Really? Well I heard something entirely different. From what I have heard, the victim was killed as a part of the vendetta the Bandits of the slums are carrying out against those who banished them from the city.] [Oh, so you know that much, huh? Okay, just between you and me, that is a load of horse shit. A hoax.]

The innkeeper said to me, leaning over the counter and lowering his voice to a barely audible whisper.

So that murder wasn't for revenge?

[Uhm, could you perhaps… go into a little bit more detail about that?] [So basically some time ago, the slums were divided between the two groups who fought with each other for dominance. As the result of that conflict, the faction that lost got cast out of the town by the one that bested them. And in order to vent their frustration over losing what they believed will always belong to them, the banished faction attacked some small village outside near Veil.]

Small village? Bandit attack? Uh-huh, looks like the pieces of the puzzle are slowly

falling into the right places. He must be taking about the group that I killed when I first arrived in this world.

[So then…] [Yup, the poor sap that got offed the other day belonged to the group that emerged victorious from that turf war. I know that rumors state that he was killed in revenge, but to me that seems very unlikely and suspicious. My money's on the bet that one of the other groups is responsible for it. Worst case scenario, we might even be on the precipice of another turf war in the slums. But enough digressing. To answer your question: no, that murder does not look like the work of the Bandits who were cast out.]

Well I'll be damned if that conflict between Bandits is not complicated as hell.

[Is that conflict still going on?] [Nobody knows for sure. But as messy as the slums may be, no one from them would dare to cause trouble for the city in broad daylight with the Knights watching them. That's why we are all safe here, kid.]

I'm sure that's his catchphrase when he's trying to get himself new customers, but it was still reassuring to hear. With all the things that he knows, maybe he'll finally be the one who will point me in the right direction when it comes to finding the Bandits.

[If the Knights have an eye on the slums, then wouldn't it be better for them to go and kill all the Bandits that are hiding in town? Because I was under the impression that they want to totally annihilate them.] [Oh, they will surely annihilate them, kiddo. Right after they're done with throwing everyone who's littering behind bars and ridding the city of its rat problem. See? Simplicity itself!]

And the Innkeeper laughed through his nose. So I guess the Knights are unable to do anything of importance when it comes to the Bandit problem, and it's the open secret among the citizens of Veil. Kinda like the police back in Japan, actually.

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Putting the matter of the usefulness of the Knights aside, if what the Bandits are after is not revenge for being cast out from the city, then wouldn't that mean that I'm going to be targeted as the one who killed the group that attacked the village after all?

The next day, I went to the slums a little earlier, sometime before midnight. The promised day of my payment to the Slave Merchant is almost upon me, so I have to do

something about the rest of the money for Roxanne's purchase today.

Once again I went out without borrowing a lantern, and observed my surroundings while blending in with the darkness around me.

It took me some time, but I finally found him near the house in the alley I discovered yesterday: The Lv.9 Bandit who dragged that woman away, the one who was able to speak Brahim. He was leaning against the house's door, probably standing on guard duty, but luckily for me it doesn't look like he's got company. Assuming that we're alone in here, I called out to him.

"Have a minute to spare?"

"Who the fuck are you?"

"No one in particular. And certainly no one suspicious."

Yeah, that's the most suspicious line in the book. You can't get any more suspicious than that even if you tried.

"The fuck do you want?"

The Bandit lifted the lantern he was holding in one hand to illuminate me. I on the other hand could not see his face at all, since he was weraing a hooded cloak that covered the entirety of his face.

"I want you to tell me something. But not for free of course. I assume you know what this is?"

I reached under my own cloak and produced the Bandit Bandana from under it.

"This is…!"

"Tell me what I want to know, and I'll be willing to part with it for as little as one gold coin."

"Just one coin, huh? Alright, what do you want to hear?"

"Tell me about Hugo."

As I suspected, just showing the Bandit Bandana to this guy loosened his lips immidiately. Offering it to him at such a dirt-cheap price was a nice finishing blow on my part as well. After all, if what I learned about the Bandit Bandana is true, meaning that it amplifies the abilities of whoever is wearing it as long as he or she has one of the criminal Jobs, I'm willing to bet that he would pay every amount of money to get

his hands on it, even if I wanted 10,000 or 20, 000 Nar for it.

"It would seem that Hugo Boss got killed. *(TL Note: the term used here is "Aniki", a word used to describe a Yakuza of older, or senior rank within the family, and is said as a title of respect from a lower ranking family member to a higher, therefore the word "Boss" is used here instead.)"*

"I see, so he's dead, huh? Could you go into more details about that? I'm afraid I didn't hear the full story of how it happened."

After feigning feeling sorry for the dead Bandit, I asked the one in front of me to continue. So the Hugo who got killed must be the same one that I heard him being mentioned last time in that conversation I have been eveasdroping on. That must be the name of the Bandit Chief whom I have killed during the attack on the village. Since this guy called him Boss then I guess he was either on friendly terms with him or respected him a great deal. If he was a member of one of the factions opposed to the one this Bandit in front of me belonged to then he wouldn't be talking about his death with such sorrowful voice. So in order to get on this guy's good side, let's keep the act of me feeling sorry for his loss a bit more.

"Sounds good to me. I'm keeping the dough in my room, so we're going to continue our talk there. What do you say to that?"

"No objections here."

I nodded in agreement. The man started walking, and I followed after him as he entered the house. So that really is a Bandit's hideout then? I had my suspicions about it, but I thought it would be too convenient to actually be true. But hey, if life's handing me an easy solution to my current problems then of course I'll take it without a second thought! This is so convenient for me, and worked out better than I expected. As I follow the bandit inside the house, I'm darting left and right with my eyes to check my surroundings and keep my sword arm steady. If I get a good look at this place, I will be able to add it as one more location I can warp to should the need for that ever arises.

"Wait here for a bit. I'll go get the money."

"'Kay."

The man told me to wait as we proceeded down the hallway. We stopped in front of the door at the very end when he told me to wait outside. He then opened the door

and entered inside. Before he closed the door behind him, the light of his lantern illuminated the inside of the room just enough so that I could also have a good look at it. The more spots for me to warp to in case of an emergency, the better.

“Sorry about that. That was the leader’s room. Today’s my turn to keep watch, so I also have to check up on him every once in a while. Good thing that he’s a super heavy sleeper. He also knew Hugo Boss, you know? Want to greet him later?”

He told me when he came back to me. The faction he belongs to really must not be a hostile one.

“That would be nice.”

After that, I followed the Bandit without saying anything. Arriving in one of the other rooms, the Bandit laid down the lantern and looked back at me. His lantern was shaped like a square without a lid. When I peeked at it from above, I could see the small flame as it flickered about. I guess this has to be this guy’s room. Other than a simple bed there was pretty much nothing else in here. Now this is a one bleak room. Compared to this one, even my room back at the inn has more things in it.

“Before I give you the money, I want to confirm that this is really a Bandit Bandana and not some kinda fake. You don’t mind that, do you?”

“Sure. Just a second.”

I reached under my cloak to take the Bandit Bandana out…

“Kuh…!”

Suddenly, the guy swung his fist towards me! I dodged the blow at the last possible moment, but as a result, the Scimitar I was carrying on my waistbelt was now being held by the Bandit. He must’ve snatched it away from me when I was busy avoiding his punch.

“That Hugo really was a moron. I assume you know about the turf war that happened some time ago, right? The one who was supposed to emerge victorious from it was supposed to be him, so my faction joined forces with another to get rid of that pest! We only wanted him out of the city so that he wouldn’t get in our way anymore, but imagine my surprise when I heard that he tried to raid some random village and failed, actually getting offed in the process! I swear, I thought I was going to laugh my balls of

when I heard that!"

"I see."

"That I'm going to get my hands on the Bandit Bandana, I will become a force to be reckoned with! But I'm not just going to stop at taking control of the slums, oh no! My ambitions are bigger than that! Much, much bigger! It's no use trying to escape, kid. Nobody else is here beside us, nobody saw us coming in here, and nobody is going to come to your rescue. Now, hand over the Bandit Bandana and don't try to do anything stupid, or else."

Now that he mentions it, I really haven't seen anyone else since we entered the house.

What this guy said just now matched with my own information. I also think it is safe to assume that his aim was to steal the Bandit Bandana from me this entire time. That is why he has brought me here to this secluded place away from the eyes of other people. He can rob me of my item here and then kill me, and no one would ever noticed that anything happened here at all. He probably didn't even bring any money for that little act of his. But if he thinks he's got me cornered, than boy do I have news for him!

9

"Well, I thought you might try to pull something like that off since you kept glancing at my waist as if you knew that I am carrying a weapon there."

"Oh really? And how is that going to help you now that you don't have any weapon on you? Or are you saying that you're going to fight me bare-handed?"

"I'm not that suicidal yet. I'll give you the Bandit Bandana."

I placed my right hand under the mantle again in search of the Bandit Bandana while hiding my left hand behind my waist in such a way that he wouldn't notice. As far as this guy is concerned, I'm just rummaging through my belongings in search of the item he wanted. Good, let the poor dimwit think that, because unbeknownst to him, I do have another weapon on me, I just don't have it equipped yet.

Keeping the Bandit Bandana in my right hand, I showed it to the Bandit who reached out for it. But before he could claim his prize, I threw the Bandana into the lantern's flame.

“WHAT THE FUCK DO YOU THINK YOU’RE DOING?!”

And he rushed towards the lantern to try and salvage the Bandit Bandana before the flames consumed it. That was his final mistake.

“…….! Gh… aaaaaa…”

He didn’t even realize what was going on until he looked at his own chest, out of which the Durandal’s blade was now protruding. That’s right, when he was overcome with panic at the prospect of losing the Bandit Bandana and showed his back to me, I used that moment to summon Durandal into my left hand and stab him in the back. I wasn’t putting much attention to where I was stabbing him, but I think I either got him straight through the heart, or somewhere around it. I killed him when there was no one around to witness it, just like he wanted to do with me. Turns out that we both had the same idea in our minds.

Soiled with his own blood, the Bandit’s body fell to the ground with a silent *thud*. Bandit Bandana was also consumed by the flames, but I didn’t consider that to be that much of a loss. I wasn’t going to wear it myself because of the stigma it would have inevitably brought down on me, and selling it at a high price would be extremely difficult too. But I gotta say, using it as Bait to upset this guy so much that he would drop down his guard was a brilliant idea on my side. I was worried that this little provocation might fail, but apparently the Bandit Bandana is of such a high value to the criminals that they are willing to risk their goddamn lives to get their hands on it. And speaking of hands, I picked up the Scimitar that the dead Bandit dropped and cut off his left hand with it. Next, I wrapped a piece of the bedsheet around the wound to stop it from bleeding and then placed the Bandit’s body in the bed and covered it with the sheets. Now it’s looking like he’s just sleeping, so that should delay the discovery of his body for at least some time. I waited until the Bandit bandana Burned completely and then put out the lantern’s flame. Now I can warp to the room where the big cheese is supposed to be sleeping.

The room was pitch black, making it impossible to see farther than my outstretched hand. There was no light source in my immediate vicinity, and nothing was making any sound. No, wait, actually, I do hear something if I listen calmly. It’s the sound of the breathing of someone who is asleep. Someone is here with me after all! I used Identify to carefully apprise my surroundings. Man, I am thankful to whoever it was who designed the Identify in such a way that it can be used even without any light around the user.

There was a total of four people in here: Lv.11, Lv.14, Lv.35 and Lv.38 Bandits. A little surprising, but it shouldn't be anything that I wouldn't be able to handle with my Durandal. The levels of the Bandits are not that high, but they should be enough to fetch me a nice prize money after I'll dispose of them. Now, the room itself may be bathed in darkness, but thanks to Identify I also know where the enemies are in relation to my own position. Two of them, Lv.38 and Lv.14 are in the back, and lv.11 and lv.35 are in the front of the room. They are sleeping in two male/female pairs. Oh, la la, looks like somebody was enjoying themselves last night.

Okay, there's no telling when any of them might wake up, so I'll have to move as quietly as possible. Slowly but surely, one foot in front of the other to avoid tripping over them like some kinda idiot.

First, I made my way towards the Lv.35 and Lv.11 pair. I crouched next to their bed and poked them lightly with my fingers to determine if I am at their feet side or head side. Yup, those are their feet. Moving to the other side it is then. When I got to the right side, I confirmed the position of the Bandit's neck and placed Durandal on it. All that is left to do now is to pull the blade towards me as strongly and quietly as possible.

SLIIIIIIIIIIIT!

The sound of the skin being cut open was so silent that I was the only one who could hear it. The Bandit died without uttering as much as a single word because I cleanly cut all of the arteries in his neck. With hat out of the way, I proceeded to cut off his left hand. I mustn't forget why I'm here. Not to defeat the Bandits, but to claim their Intelligence Cards. With the second wrist in tow I opened the Item Box and placed it in the same slot as the first wrist, and wrapped the body in the sheets. Since this Bandit was Lv.35, I'm bound to get a nice sum of money for his Intelligence Card, I'm sure of it. Now to collect the Card of that other Bandit. And if something unexpected happens, I can always run away with Warp. I moved to the other side of the bed and placed Durandal's blade at the Lv.11 female Bandit's neck. This time I pulled it diagonally upwards.

"Gu……!"

The female Bandit moaned weakly. Looks like I overdid it this time because I pushed the hip of the blade further than I have originally intended and misjudged the distance. The second Bandit is dead, but there are still two of them remaining. And with that moan just now, there's no telling if they won't wake up, so I grabbed the third wrist

and made my way to the other bed as fast and quietly as possible…

“Ugh… who’s there…?”

The other woman’s voice echoed throughout the room. Fuck, so she woke up after all! I confirmed her exact position with Identify, and cut off her head with one swing of Durandal. The head fell onto the bed without making any sound, but even so I heard that something was moving hurriedly across the bed. That must be the Lv.38 Bandit attempting to escape. He rolled of the bed and hit the ground pretty hard, but seconds after that I heard the sound of something being picked up and swung around. Looks like my current enemy equipped himself with a Copper Sword. It must have been hidden under the bed. Dude, I understand that you might be confused, but who in their right mind would be grabbing a sword first thing after being awoken?! Were you assuming that you might get attacked in your sleep?! Anyway, this puts me at a disadvantage here. I don’t know the exact layout of the room, so the wisest option is to fall back to the corridor where I will have more space to move around. So, I warped there without a second thought and waited outside the door. Just like the room, the corridor was now pitch black. I readied my sword, assumed the stance and braced myself.

Seconds later, the door to the room where the Bandits slept seemed to have opened with a *click* sound. The real question is: what should I do now? If I allow the is Lv.38 Bandit to leave the room, he’s surely going to try and call for help, assuming that there are still more people in here. If I allow him to do it, I will learn their location, which will in tur allow me to take their Intelligence Cards if their levels will be high enough. But that option might as well backfire against me if the numbers of the enemies will be too great for me to handle by myself. No, that is a risk that I absolutely cannot take. Alright then, I’m offing this guy as soon as he walks out of that door.

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I waited until the last possible second and thrusted Durandal forward the moment the Bandit’s silhouette appeared out of the door. Durandal’s blade pierced the guy’s chest as if it was made of melted butter instead of flesh and bone. But when it came to getting it out of there, I felt a good amount of resistance before I finally succeeded. The lv.38 Bandit’s body hits the ground. I cut of his left wrist and placed the body back in the room. With the Bandit’s wrist in tow I went back to the corridor.

I could hear noises coming from the outside. I should have seen it coming that defeating

the four Bandits in a not-exactly-stealthy manner is going to attracts unwanted attention sooner rather than later. Perhaps some of the Bandits outside heard the commotion we were making and they were now rushing in to check what has happened? I looked around the corridor with Identify. It showed that there was no more Bandits around in my immediate surroundings. The only thing my Identity shown was the Copper Sword laying on the ground where the Lv.38 Bandit dropped it.

Initially I wanted to have a look around the house in hopes of finding some Bandit treasure, but it looks like doing that might prove to be a tad difficult under the current circumstances, so I just grabbed the last wrist firmly and warped to the safest place I could think of right now where no one would come looking for me: the Labyrinth.

I did it.

That was the first thing that sprung into my mind.

No, it's not like that. No matter what might be the reason behind it, murder should never be a case for rejoicing. Oh, hell no, I can already feel the effects of using too much MP kicking in. It might not be the same kind of moody trip I had when I used Overwhelming or Warp for the first time, but it's still going to be inconvenient, not that I could do anything about it. After all, I ended up using Warp three times in quick succession: first to move from that Bandit's move to the room where his boss was sleeping, second to get out of that room into the corridor and third to escape from the house in the slums to the Labyrinth here. I did it all so I could finally achieve my goal of getting enough money to buy Roxanne, but even so I felt like crap for killing those Bandits. Good thing that guilt is only induced by my MP dropping too much, because those guys were most certainly the worst scum there was, so dispatching them on a one-way trip to the afterlife should not be all that big of a deal. Okay so now, in order to improve my mental state, let's kill some Needlewoods to regain my lost MP. Michio, you need to remind yourself once again that this is how things are done in this world. This is not modern-day Japan. If you want to see something done, you have to haul ass and do it yourself, whether that something would be killing monsters to improve your mental stability or murdering Bandits to trade their ID's for money. There is no police force here to do your dirty work for you, and law and human rights seem to be more like guidelines than a thing to be upheld at all times.

After killing a bunch of Needlewoods I have regained my confidence and stability. It good that I didn't have to do it longer, because exploring the Labyrinth, even if it was a floor I was fairly familiar with now might not have been a good idea in the mentally

impaired state. Before I returned to normal I had some slight difficulties with moving around due to the waves of the anxiety attacks that were constantly washing over me, basically I only fought the ones that tried to stop me from reaching the Labyrinth's exit.

After getting my shit together I walked out of the Labyrinth. I got the Intelligence Cards from the hands that I managed to snatch and threw the remaining left hands and bloodied rags into the nearby bushes, and ditched my bloodied mantle in a separate location. If nobody will see me walking around in clothes that are dirty with blood, then nobody will suspect me of anything, which will in turn allow me to avoid troublesome questions. When I finished disposing of the evidence of my involvement in the battle with the Bandits, I just casually returned to my room at the inn where I washed my hands and face with warm water, and then lay on the bed after hiding the Scimitar under my pillow as a precautionary measure. At first, I was having trouble with closing my eyes due to adrenaline still rushing through my veins, but eventually I managed to drift off to sleep. And this time, I woke up only after the sun has completely risen. Maybe it was because last night I slept very little before I went to deal with the Bandits, but today I slept better than I expected. I was in high spirits after reminding myself of what I managed to pull off just a few hours ago, but even more than that, I felt relieved.

Right now, in this moment, obtaining Roxanne for myself no longer feels like an impossible dream to achieve. Of course, I cannot be sure of anything until I'll go claim the prize money for the Bandits, but for now I guess I've done all that I could. So if it turns up that after all my efforts I still won't have enough money, I guess I can't be helped anymore. For now, all that I have left to decide is where I am going to redeem those Intelligence Cards. That was what I was thinking about even as I was well on my way to the land of dreams. The specific problem that I was mulling over was if I should go do it at the Knight's outpost here in Veil, or should I go somewhere else with it? Also, I can't help but to wonder how much of a stir my little stunt is going to cause throughout the slums? I guess I just have to wait and see, but if they know what's good for them, they'd better sit quietly. Or maybe they won't make any kinda fuss at all, since murders in the slums are an everyday occurrence, so they might treat it as not that big of a deal.

Still, I've already cashed in some bounties for the Bandits five days ago. If I go claim another prize for myself in such a short amount of time, I will be bound to get some unwanted attention to myself. If I go to other towns, the possibility of that happening could be greatly reduced, but if I go for it, I have no guarantee if I'm not going to get

scammed since I don't know if the system of converting bounty to cold hard cash is the same in every city in this world, or if every town has its own separate systems. There is still too much that I don't know. As far as I'm concerned, it might be that a bounty that's valid in one town will not be valid in another, because one town does not care about the problems of another. It is also quite possible that the money may not be paid on the same day the inquiry will be made, and that would be quite a problem since today is the day when I agreed to get the money for Roxanne's purchase to the Slave Merchant.

Another thing that I have to look out for is the unwanted spreading of the information that another group of Bandits has been defeated. I didn't say much when we were at the station to claim the prizes from the attack at the village, but I don't now if Picker-san didn't come back for some additional questioning. It also might be possible that the Knights and the merchants who come to do business in Veil are well acquainted with one another, or maybe they are working with each other behind the scenes? It wouldn't be that strange, since as the only merchant in the village he'd be a perfect source of information on everything that's happening there. But if that was the case, then the more probable scenario would be that the Knights would have alerted the village that they might get attacked, and he'd report back to them right after the attack instead of waiting until his next shopping trip. Or maybe that's because he's actually a double agent, working with both Bandits and the Knights without them knowing?! Nah, now you're just picking at straws here you idiot! There's no way something like that would be true!

What I'm getting so paranoid about is essentially this: will I be questioned again with regards to the circumstances of obtaining those Intelligence Cards? Cause if I bring them to Another town where I'll get to be interviewed by someone who's too inquisitive about the details then it will be rather troublesome for me. And if I told my interviewer that I cannot share any details such as where I defeated the Bandits because they would want to investigate the site that would only make me look distrustful and would induce further questions, like [*If you defeated Bandits in Veil, then why didn't you bring those Intelligence Cards to them?*], and I wouldn't want that to happen. So considering all of the above, I guess it's going to be the safest for me to claim the prize money from the Knights here in Veil after all.

11

After finishing my breakfast in the morning, I left the inn and made my way to the building opposite of it, the Knight Order guardhouse. After I walked inside, I noticed

that the Knight who questioned me before and the beautiful Female Knight were nowhere to be found. Well, what should I do then? I guess it works out for me because it eliminates the possibility of the Knights being extra suspicious of me, but now that I think about it, the whole process would be a lot smoother if I could report to someone who's actually well aware of the situation in the city instead of just some pencil pusher who couldn't give two shits about it. In that respect, being recognizable might be to my advantage in the future, so I better make a mental note of it now so that I won't forget about it.

For the time being, I'll just have a walk at the brothel district to see how's the situation there. According to the information I have gathered the Knights should have a duty rotation around noon, so I'll wait until then and come back to see if any familiar faces showed up.

I walked around the slums for two hours and then some, but from what I saw it does not look to be any different from the usual. Maybe they have yet to find the bodies of the Bandits with their left hands cut off, or maybe the residents of the slums really just don't give a fuck about gang wars happening in their immediate neighborhood? Anyway, if the situation here is stable, then I guess there's no need for me to be here anymore. Enough time should have passed, so let's make my way back to the guardhouse. Waiting turned out to a good decision, because when I came back, I saw a familiar-looking Apprentice Knight behind one of the desks.

"Hello there. Working as hard as ever I see."

I called out to the Apprentice Knight

"Ah, yes, welcome."

When I looked at him with Identify, I saw that he is still an Apprentice Knight, but now he was lv.5. Last time I was here he was only Lv.4, so that means that in the last five days he managed to Level Up his Job once.

"May I take a moment or perhaps now is not a good time?"

"Oh no, by all means, please, do have a seat."

And I did just that.

"So, what can I help you with today?"

“Actually, last night when I was out on the town, I had a run in with some pretty shady guys. I think they might have been Bandits.”

I took out the Intelligence Cards of the Bandits I defeated and handed them over to the apprentice Knight.

“Bandits, you say?”

“Yes. They were the ones who attacked me first so I had no choice but to defend myself. They probably took me for an easy prey since I’m still relatively new to the city, but I managed to turn the tables on them.”

I exclaimed somewhat proudly. That was my plan here: to make myself look like a capable guy who could stand his ground even when faced with the enemies such as Bandits. As to whether or not this plan will work, I guess we shall see, but judging by the fact that the Apprentice Knight smiled faintly when he heard me say that, I think he successfully bought my story. Or at least that’s what I want to believe.

“I understand. Can I see your Intelligence Card?”

“O course. Here you go.”

I placed my left hand in front of the knight. After he confirmed my identity, he said that he’s going to run a check on the Cards belonging to the Bandits and told me to wait for a few minutes as he disappeared deeper into the building. And he did so without asking pretty much any questions at all, which is a huge success in and out of itself. Alright, so far, so good. Now let’s just wait and see if we can keep it up. Eventually the Apprentice Knight came back with a pouch of coins. The beautiful Female Knight came together with him.

“We’ve confirmed everything we needed to confirm. The owners of those Intelligence Cards were Bandits without a shadow of a doubt. Two of them had a bounty placed on their heads, so you’ll be getting the prize money for getting rid of them.”

Without any further comments he handed me the money pouch, so I took it and left the guardhouse. They didn’t even want to hear about the details such as where the battle took place, what happened to the rest of the bodies. It was exactly the same as the last time: confirmation, handing of the money and that’s it. I was once again reminded just how horrible the treatment of the outlaws seems to be in this town, and who knows if it’s not like that in this entire world? But since I can’t do anything to

change that (and I don't even know if I'd want to change that) I guess there's no use thinking about it. What I can do now, is to go and count how much of the prize money I have obtained, and be glad that this whole event went much smoother than I have initially expected it to go. I quickly moved to some shaded place and looked inside the pouch. How much gold and silver coins have I got this time?

After confirming that the pouch contained more than seven gold coins, I felt a sense of satisfaction and unconstrained joy surging in my chest. If I add those to the 33 gold and 228 silver coins that are already in my possession, it will be more than enough for me to finally buy Roxanne!

Returning back to the main street, I made my way towards the Slave Merchant's shop with incredibly light steps. These last five days have been filled with nothing but stress, tension and uncertainty, but soon it will be all over. But the closer I got to the shop, the more my heart was being filled with nervousness and anticipation. You cannot feel relax just yet, Michio! There is still one last hurdle for you to jump over. I have to make sure that this whole transaction is legit, and Alan the Slave Merchant won't just run away with my money after I hand it over to him.

"It's Michio. I'd like to have a word with mister Alan. Could you please get him for me?"

Finally, I arrived at the shop and asked the clerk who opened the door to get Alan-san for me.

"Please wait here. Master Alan will be with you shortly."

I passed through the room next to the entrance sat in the waiting room. I also summoned Durandal and placed it on my waist. Normally I would have kept it hidden, but in this case, it might be better to present myself with the most expensive looking equipment got so that the Slave Merchant will know that I absolutely mean business, even if I can't exactly tell if Durandal is all that gorgeous-looking. Also, its going to be my countermeasure against any attempts at robbing me of my hard-earned 40,000 Nar. But for the time being, let's try to improve his image of me as much as possible, and maybe I'll get on the list of his best customers, or something along those lines. To that end, maybe I should have worn something a little more extravagant than a simple Leather Armor?

"I'm sorry for the wait, oh most esteemed customer!"

Alan -san has finally come to greet me.

“No worries.”

“Since you’ve come here, then am I correct in assuming that you have all of the necessary funds?”

“Of course.”

“Then please, come with me.”

“Alright.”

And so, he guided me to the room I have visited twice in the past. This will be my moment of truth.

12

I sat on the sofa and drank the herbal tea that was brought to me by a female servant who was not Roxanne.

“Please enjoy your drink, dear customer.”

When she left, the Slave Merchant urged me to drink. So I placed the cup at my mouth and pretended to drink the tea. If he wanted to take me out and take my money, the fastest way to do so would be to slip some poison into my drink, so in order to prevent that I’m just not going to drink any of it. I took the backpack off my back and removed the drawstring bag from it. I removed all of my silver coins from it first. All 228 of them.

“I hope you don’t mind so many silver coins?”

“Of course not. Such an amount was well within my range of expectations.”

Then I also took out the 40 gold coins.

“This should be enough, right?”

That is all the money that I so desperately collected. I don’t know what I’ll do if it still

ends up not being enough.

“Most certainly, that’s all the money we agreed upon. Dear Roxanne will be here in just a moment, so please wait patiently for her, alright?”

After diligently checking the number of coins, the Slave Merchant placed them all on a table in neatly arranged piles and had another servant take them away. I’m actually impressed that he managed to count all of them up so fast and that he remained so calm and collected, because what I did was essentially pulling an equivalent of paying a multi-yen bill with 5-yen coins. Worst case scenario, you could even get sued for harassment. While we waited for Roxanne to arrive, I continued to fake-drink my herbal tea.

And then she finally came.

We heard a quiet knocking on the door, so Alan the Slave Merchant stood up to open them for her. She was wearing a simple yellow tunic and the pants of a matching color. She entered the room and timidly hid behind the Slave Merchant. Aww, that’ s so cute, but it’s alright. I’m not going to do anything to you, so there’s no need for you to hide. Then she stretched her neck and looked at me shyly from behind Alan-san’s back. Ahh, her face is still beautiful. She is a beautiful girl through and through! I was afraid that the last time I saw her I might have beautified her in my mind due to how horny I was, but thankfully that was not the case at all! If anything, the real thing was even more beautiful than I remembered!

“I’m sorry for making you wait. Thank you for purchasing me. I will be in your care from now on.”

Roxanne looks at me, but when our eyes met, she immediately averted them back. Her dog ears also shook due to the motion she did with her head. Those ears are so uber cute! I want to touch them! I want to pet them! She could be a little less shy, but I guess there will come a time for us to work on that. I also don’t think I did anything she should be thanking me for, but then again, that might be just common courtesy, so it would be best to respond to her in kind.

“Likewise. I hope we will get along together just fine. I’ll be looking forward to it.”

“I am looking forward to it as well, but first, allow me to express my heartfelt apologies to you!”

ロクサーヌが俺を見てあわてて頭を下げる。
イヌミミが揺れた。あの耳はかわいい。
ロクサーヌが頭を下げたまま告げた。

「……私にはご主人様に
買っていただく資格がありません」

And she bowed her head down low. Why is she doing that? Could it be that she's apologizing to me for the Slave Merchant who wanted to screw me over by not giving her to me and running away with the money?

"Can you… explain?"

I gently asked her.

"Master, even though I told you I would wait those five days for you, to come buy me, I doubted if you will be able to get all the money needed for that! I thought you will be incapable of doing that, and that you would not come back for me! I beg you to forgive me for my lack of faith in you, and I will understand if you will no longer be willing to have me as your slave!"

Sweet rock'n rolling Jesus on a fish stick girl! If I could, I would have changed your name to Moexanne without a second thought!

"Roxanne my dear, this is all so very touching, but I think our customer is dead-set on going through with the purchase. To that end, let us finalize the deal by signing an official contract. Michio-sama, your Intelligence Card, if you would?"

"Ah, okay."

"Roxanne, you as well."

"Y-Yes."

I walked up to the Slave Merchant and placed my left hand in front of him, and Roxanne did the same after a bit of initial hesitation. So apparently, she doubted if I will ever come back to actually buy her, and that's why she felt the need to apologize to me. Honestly, after hearing how much the Slave Merchant wanted for her, I had every right to do just that: forget about buying her, turn my back on her and never come back to this shop. But how could I have done something as cruel as that after witnessing how beautiful she was?

Slave Merchant placed his own hand in front of ours and casted as spell, after which our Intelligence Cards emerged from our wrists. So not only authority figures, knights and innkeepers can manifest it, but merchants are capable of doing so as well. Then he murmured something that I did not understand.

“And that concludes your contract. Please check your Intelligence Cards to see if everything is in order.”

“Understood.”

Roxanne showed her own Card to me.

Roxanne: Female, 16 years old, Beast Warrior.

Owned by: Kaga Michio

“I see. And with that, the master-slave pack between you has been officially made.”

Roxanne’s Intelligence Card now lists me as her owner. So I guess the Slave Merchant wasn’t a scammer after all. But I don’t regret being distrustful of him. One cannot be too cautious when it comes to the well being of his money after all.

Anyway, since all the formalities have now been completed, I made the best smile I could muster and showed her my own Card.

“Uhm, are you really sure about that?”

Roxanne’s beautiful eyes peeked at me when she asked me if I was fine with her inspecting my Intelligence Card.

“If it’s you, then I have no problems with it being seen.”

“!!!… Yes!”

And she took it in her small, gentle hands. When I l glanced at it as she did so, I noticed that it has been rewritten indeed. The contents were now as follows:

Kaga Michio: Male, 17 years old

Job: Explorer, Free Citizen

Owner of: Roxanne

The Job that was displayed as my first one was still the Explorer. But now, it also listed that I am Roxanne’s owner.

I can’t wait to see what life in this new strange world is going to have in store for us from now on.

〈**To be continued in <A Harem in the Fantasy World Dungeon Volume 2>** 〉

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